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from Mrs. Faidhner

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Flora mistaking her Uncle General Oldstock for her Guardian Lord Arundel.

2

24. Ivy Lane. Paternoster Row.
March. 29_1823.

THE

WIDOW'S CHOICE;

OR

One, Two, Three.

BY

MRS. CATHERINE G. WARD,

Authoress of the Rose of Clavemont; Mysterious Marriage; Orphan Boy; Thorn, or Doubtful Property; Family Portraits; and the Cottage on the Cliff.

"I have been told that I have a facility in *raising the spirits* and *creating good humour* wherever I appear."

London:

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THE

WIDOW'S CHOICE,

&c.

CHAPTER I.

——————"She was form'd
To wander gaily all the day in woods;
To gather flowers; to feed on the wild grape;
To drink the natural spring; to list to birds,
And find her joy in breathing balmy air;
She was not made for courts or camps."

LORD JOHN RUSSEL.

AT the close of a long winter campaign, when peace had only just begun to wave her gentle banners over the heads of her gallant chiefs; when the olive branch entwined with the laurel leaf, that now graced the brows of smiling victory; General Oldstock once more landed on the shores of Britain, his native home, the home of his fathers! the free-born land of peace and plenty! from which he had been exiled for nearly a period of *ten long years;* lengthened, as indeed they seemed, by the toils of war, of hardship, and all the precarious changes of a soldier's fortune. For the general, although one of the bravest and most gallant of men, *had not,* through the whole of this tedious campaign, so acquired the practical part of philosophy,

as to behold unmoved the dreadful carnage he had been witness to; nor to consider with apathy on the fate of his brave associates, who had fallen in the battle's heat, and lay unburied on the field of honour. It was a sight he could not turn from without a tear! sacred to the memory of many a gallant friend, whose hearts had beat congenial with his own.

General Oldstock, however, was not of a disposition to yield either to excessive mirth or sorrow; and when after the dear-bought victory, purchased with the loss of thousands, he received the mandate for returning to his native country, he did not express, by sign or speech, any of those unbounded transports, or extravagant demonstrations of lively joy, which are usually felt on such occasions; for which there were certainly *two existing causes:* for having only three beings in the whole created world, that could claim a near relationship to him, he was indifferent about giving the necessary orders for his embarkation on board one of the vessels that was bound for England; for the two former of these relatives (a brother and sister, both his seniors by some years,) the General did not care a single *sous*. There was then only *one* tie that attached him to the old family mansion, which for the term of ten years he had not beheld; and that was *his niece, little Flora*, the only child of his brother, Sir Oliver Oldstock, of Oldstock Hall, in the county of Northamptonshire. She was a smiling rosy dimpled cherub, just entering into her eighth year when he had set out on his last campaign, of the most engaging disposition and bewitching vivacity: and though he had no violent affection for his brother, Sir Oliver, yet he had a partiality for Flora, which was not only owing

to her infantine sweetness and beauty, but to the memory of her late mother, whom the little girl strongly resembled; and it was some satisfaction that he should again behold her, *now*, as he imagined, in the bloom of womanhood; and still more, the counterpart of that exemplary creature, whose loss he had so greatly deplored.

"Yes," thought the General, "Flora must now be nearly eighteen years of age; and, I have no doubt, is a prodigious fine girl. Yes, I have a precise notion, what my favourite Flora must be *now*, whom ten years ago I thought was one of the loveliest cherubs in the world! What a pretty dimple the rogue had, just at the corner of her mouth, when she used to call me *her dear uncle Hector!* Flora had a lisp too; yes, if I don't mistake, it was a pretty lisp on her prattling tongue; and to me there was melody in the sounds. Well, I shall return shortly to England, and post it away to Oldstock Hall, on purpose to see Flora; for what care I for any body else but my niece.—And why? There is no body else like her! Sir Oliver is—— Zounds! I shall get into a passion, if I remember what Sir Oliver *is*—what *he was*—. Why! *he is* my *brother*, so I will forgive him. Then there is my sister, poor Lydia! an old maid against her very conscience; for I do believe that she would have married at forty-five, if any body had asked her; but *she, like* Sir Oliver, is—selfish! mercenary! worldly! and *for that* I cannot love her. Last of all there is mother Mildew, the old housekeeper, I remember her well; she is the very epitome of my brother and sister both together, and would starve a saint, were it but to cost her a cheese-paring out of her own cup-board. So there is none but Flora

that I am like to meet at Oldstock Hall with any pleasurable sensation, after an absence of ten long years! So much for family affairs," concluded the General; but he had quite forgot, that Juba, his black servant, was standing behind him; and during the whole time that the General was indulging himself in this *self-harangue* concerning the descendants of Oldstock Hall, had listened to the whole detail of the family virtues, as described so humorously by his master, but to which Juba had certainly *not listened*, if he could have avoided it. But there was no possibility of effecting his escape, without the necessity of his walking across the apartment, and coming exactly in front of the General, which would immediately have put an end to his family cogitations, and occasioned a severe reprimand for presuming to interrupt him; for Juba was well acquainted with the whimsicalities of his master's disposition, who, though in the heat of his passion, would perhaps have threatened to *knock him down;* yet in *the next succeeding moment*, would probably forget the cause of his displeasure, and converse with him in his usual kind tone and manner.

There was *but one plan then* that Juba could adopt, and that was, to observe the most profound silence the while that the General was employed *in talking to himself;* but the very moment (to use a military phrase) there happened to be a *cessation of arms*, Juba briskly advanced with all the necessary apparatus for his master's breakfast, a tray with coffee, sugar, biscuits, cream, honey, &c. on which the General exclaimed:—

"Why, where the devil have you been all this while, Sir?"

Now Juba well knew that he durst not hazard a laugh while answering this enquiry, though he found much difficulty in refraining from it, as he replied,—

"Behind *him chair* Massa; me no like say him, breakfast ready."

"And why not," cried the General?

On which the black replied, "Because Massa talkee talkee to himself; and no like Juba stoppee him. Juba no like make Massa angry."

"And zounds! if you had, I believe I should have thrown the coffee pot at your head, (uttered the General with a smile,) so you have done wisely. Socrates himself, with all his wisdom, could not have achieved a point more sagaciously."

The black chuckled; and the General sat down to his breakfast with a good appetite and in excellent spirits; to which it was very probable, that his morning cogitations had in no small degree contributed; for the image of Flora still swam across his imagination, and was infused into every object that was sweet and lovely around him.

A cloudless sky is at all times beautiful; but on this morning it seemed transcendantly so to the General. The air too was balmy, or breathed a more balmy influence over his spirits; or was it the opening scent of the orange blossoms, that grew in such profusion beneath the lattice of the windows? or the buds of the party-coloured geraniums, that sent forth such fragrant and delicious perfumes on *this morning* more than any other? or had the birds borrowed softer notes, and learned to sing more sweetly? for now they seemed to salute his ear with the most joyous songs of enchanting and sprightly melody. No! it was neither the fra-

grance of the flowers, nor the melody of the birds, which had awakened such new delight in the breast of the General; but it was Flora, dear Flora, that had effected this pleasing change: and the General resolved that when Ensign Conway, (who was also his Secretary,) came for the morning dispatches, that he would immediately make arrangements for his speedy return to England; and with this resolution in his *head*, and Flora in his *heart*, the General finished his meal just in time to receive Ensign Conway, whom Juba very shortly announced; and he was immediately admitted into the presence of his commander.

"The troops are all embarked, and will shortly set sail for England," cried Ensign Conway, after being seated for a few moments in the General's apartment.

"That is a good hearing," replied the General, "we have had warm work of it, and the poor fellows will now enjoy a repose from the intolerable hardships of the continuance of this long campaign. They have been suffering through many a weary march, and heavy cannonading also; and every man is anxious to re-visit his native land, after an absence of ten long years, Ensign Conway."

"Doubtless, General," uttered the Ensign; but the *doubtless* was pronounced with a cold and listless air; and the General, who felt himself warmed with the subject nearest his heart, exclaimed in more animated tones;

"Yes, every man who has had a taste of war, will also have an additional zest for peace, when he can inhale it *once* more beneath the influence of his native skies. There is magic in the word *home* to every British soldier. The very winds that bear him thither,

seem to kiss the white bosom of the ocean so lightly, that blow they ever so roughly, we but think it as the gentlest breeze that fans the leaves of summer roses; so every man beholds the land which gave him birth *once more*, he cares not with how much difficulty he obtains the blessing. I shall embark for England very shortly, Ensign Conway."

"I thought, General, that you intended to go to Florence;" uttered the Ensign, with somewhat of a disappointed, and certainly a desponding air, which was by no means unremarked by the General, who instantly replied,

"Why so I did, Ensign, so I did; and I remember that I once told you, that there was not an individual in England that I cared a fig for, save a dear little niece, called Flora; and you have not forgotten it. You have an excellent memory, Ensign Conway." Instantly the cheeks of the young soldier glowed with a colour of the brightest vermillion; and he energetically pronounced;—

"My memory would indeed be basely treacherous, General, could I once forget the kindness, the friendship, the protection, with which you have so greatly honoured me; but who is there that does not know your liberality, your generous heart, and your natural warmth and feeling!"

"So much the worse for me," said the General, "for they will then remember, that I am the most passionate dog in existence. But tush; don't talk of my liberality, it is mere nonsense; when a man has not got a shilling to bless himself, to talk of his liberality, unless that you can find the world will give him credit for it; but let us to the point in question, En-

sign Conway; I am resolved to go to England, instead of winging my way to Florence, as I had at first intended; for no other gratification under heaven, but of seeing my niece, Flora." To which the Ensign mournfully replied;—

"Wherever you go, General, may all good angels go with you, my prayers, and the eternal gratitude of him who never can cease to venerate your memory."

A pause ensued, during which the young soldier had turned his head towards the window, probably to conceal a tear, which he afterwards brushed hastily from his eyes; and meanwhile the General had felt himself considerably affected. It was the first instance that he had met with a return of the kindness he had bestowed on his fellow-men. It was genuine gratitude, so rare, so unexampled, in all the wanderings of his chequered life, that he welcomed the sweet stranger, and resolved to cherish it for the future, to commemorate the day of victory; and extending his hand to Ensign Conway, he exclaimed;—

"Henry, from this day we part no more; when I return to England, I will take you with me; and if I go elsewhere, you shall still be the companion of the peregrinations of an old soldier. But mark me, boy, when I die, I have nothing to leave you, not a single sous to set you a-going; what say you to that? Don't think, because I *am brother to a Baronet, and a General in the army*, that I shall be buried *with immortal honours*, or leave to a rising generation, a fortune which I could not purchase e'en with the *toils* and *hardships* of war. No, Henry, thou knowest *full well*, boy, that gold does not grow on a soldier's laurels; or, young as *thou* art, *thou* hadst been wealthy.—But no

more of this; I am growing vapourish, and must change the subject. You must get in readiness to accompany me to England, and I will take you down to Oldstock Hall, to see Sir Oliver and Flora; and there we will stay awhile, if they will give us welcome: if not, we will change quarters as soon as possible, and set off for Florence. What say you, young Hotspur?"

But the power of utterance was for many moments denied to Ensign Conway, till his full heart had relieved itself by a shower of tears, of which, though a *soldier*, he did *not feel ashamed;* and he sobbed out an acknowledgment of his thanks in a voice scarcely articulate, which was more than once interrupted by the General waving his hand, and bidding him compose himself.

"You know I do not like thanks too often repeated," uttered the General. "What I have done is to please myself, and that *rewards* me sufficiently. I have a brother that I do not care three-farthings for, though he is a baronet, with five thousand a year, by the death of my father, whom my early follies disobliged: he cut me off with a shilling, and left Oliver his whole estate, while I pursued the fortunes of war; rugged enough I found it: but still it has made me a General in the army, and it has done more, Henry, than affluence has done for my brother;—it has given me a heart to feel for my fellow men, and only to repine, when my purse is not able to bear it company."

"Generous exalted man," exclaimed the Ensign; "and it has given you a name far more enviable than wealth or titles can bestow; *they will sink to* paltry insignificance, when virtues like *thine will reach* the vaulted heavens, and reflect immortal honours on thy name and country."

"Not so fast, my dear boy," cried the General, "unless you wish to make me the hero of a romance, which I am somewhat too old for. I know that you are grateful for the little service I have rendered to you; but no more eulogy, if you love me."

Ensign Conway knew better than to disobey the commands of the General, whose word with him had ever been a law: and he retired, after receiving the necessary orders, with a heart transported with joy, and overwhelmed with gratitude.

He well knew, that a separation from his commander, though not in actual service, would occasion him the loss of a sincere friend and able instructor, whose military interest had raised him to the rank he now held as a commissioned officer; and that it might yet do much to forward his prospects through life; for General Oldstock, though, as he described himself, by no means an affluent man, was yet possessed of considerable influence in his military character; and no man was more loved and universally respected for his private actions as a gentleman: and the poor friendless Henry felt, that if once deserted by him, all his opening prospects would be blighted; for he was an orphan youth. His mother had died of a fever in the hospital, and some years before, his father, who was an adjutant in the same regiment that the General commanded, fell the victim of his bravery in one of the late battles on the continent.

Poor Henry was then recommended to the notice of General Oldstock; and having in several engagements displayed a courage and bravery far superior to his years, the General obtained an ensigncy for him, and ever after distinguished him with every mark of kind-

ness and attention, making Ensign Conway his Secretary in place of the one that died; and thus putting him in the way of forwarding his abilities, as well as laying a foundation for his military career: but the iron hand of war being laid aside, this interest was for a while suspended, and the General then proposed to take Henry with him to Florence, the country where his mother was born. Hence may be attributed that air of despondency which marked the countenance of the young soldier, when informed that he had changed his intention, and was going to England.

And what right had he to impede the wishes of his brave commander, or presume to remind him of a promise, which it was probable that he would yet remember? That there was a home in every country, for all *but him*, could not fail to strike him deeply; what were then his unbounded transports, to be told by his commander-in-chief, his friend, his patron, that henceforth their fortunes were to be inseparable? And it may be imagined that the so greatly honoured youth did not sleep that night, nor the succeeding one, in contemplating the happy prospects that awaited him, and reflecting on the unexampled goodness and philanthropy of his protector.

Meanwhile the most active preparations were making for the General to embark for England, and every necessary order given by Ensign Conway to convey his property on board. Previous to which, however, Juba was informed by his master, that he was going to quit India; and that he had his choice, either to accompany him to England, or return to his own country, being a native of Trincomole.

"How Massa," cried Juba, "me, no you slave? how

Juba go back to him own country, when him Massa's slave?"

"You are my servant," said the General, "but I never yet considered you my slave; I will never suffer any man to be my slave: that appellation is unworthy of a Christian, and ought to be extirpated from the name of man, to which it is an eternal disgrace. Juba, you are therefore free; it is nature's privilege, nor will I counteract its sacred laws; and you are at liberty to return to your own country; or, if you can make yourself happy, remain in my service; take then your choice. To-morrow I embark for England."

The faithful black testified his gratitude to his kind indulgent master by a burst of tears; and afterwards by the joyful exclamation of;—

"Good, good Massa! no good in my country; give whip and chain to poor Juba when him sick; and no workee workee all day in plantations. Juba love Massa! no leave Massa! live wid Massa all him days of him life."

"I am satisfied," uttered the General, with an air of gratification which was peculiar to him. "I have tried the attachment of this faithful creature, and will stake my life on his fidelity towards me."

And the result was, that Juba, no longer a slave, remained in the service of his master, and embarked with him, along with Ensign Conway, for the shores of Great Britain. They had a prosperous and speedy voyage to the river Thames; and the General, ever impatient of delay, which he always considered dangerous, could not be prevailed on to sleep more than one night in the city of London; but took post on the

ensuing morning, with Juba mounted on the box, to the county of Northamptonshire; stopping only to change horses and take some slight refreshments, till they fairly arrived within five miles of Sir Oliver's mansion; and it was not till then, that the General evinced any signs of internal emotion. The sight of his native land had not *till this moment* appeared to give him a pleasurable sensation; but now he seemed suddenly roused to energy by every object he beheld. Every bush that now was covered with the white blossomed spray, and every tree, which marked the residence of some well-remembered dweller, whom he had known in early days, arose to his recollection; and putting his head out of the window of the chaise, he pointed them out to the observation of Ensign Conway, with a peculiar satisfaction which shone brightly in his warm breathing and benevolent countenance.

"Do you not observe yon lonely dwelling on the left," uttered he, "almost concealed in the midst of the embowering shades? There is a primrose bank close beside it, which at the beginning of spring yields the most delicious and balmy fragrance to the passing traveller; it was once the cottage of one of Sir Oliver's tenants, a poor but industrious labourer, who had a wife and a family of six small children; but on the day when the rents were paid, honest Giles, with the tears in his eyes, pleaded his extreme poverty, and confessed his inability to answer the demands made upon him by Sir Oliver's steward, humbly beseeching a little further indulgence might be granted to him in his necessitous circumstances." The General paused, passed his hand across his forehead, and heaved a deep sigh,

while in the interval of this pause, Ensign Conway had exclaimed;—

"Which solicitation of honest Giles was of course complied with."

"'Tis a lie," thundered out the General, "a confounded lie! The infernal scoundrel refused the request of poor Giles, and Sir Oliver —— what think you Henry, that Sir Oliver did, when he was informed by the steward of this man's distress?"

"I should imagine, General," said the Ensign, "that no man could be base enough to add to it; and Sir Oliver probably contributed to his relief."

"Contributed to the devil and all his imps," roared out the General, who had been waxing warm during the recital of this tale, "he did contribute with a vengeance; for he actually turned Giles, with his wife and six children, out of the cottage which he had so long inhabited, to seek for shelter in an humble shed, where they perished for want. Gods! let me not remember the transactions of that day, or I shall burn with fury at the thoughts of it, and wish that Sir Oliver was ——. Henry, I was at this period the wildest, most extravagant young dog in existence, and a soldier of fortune; but youth had not robbed me of feeling, nor my vivacious spirits of sensibility; and no sooner had this tale reached my ear, than I posted away to Northamptonshire, paid a visit to Sir Oliver, taxed him with his brutality, gave his scoundrel of a steward a sound drubbing, snatched a kiss of Flora, and quitted Oldstock Hall, (as I thought) *for ever*. It is now ten years ago, Henry, since I parted with Sir Oliver *last*; but we were *then* reconciled to one another; *and before that time* the *cause* of our quarrel respecting *this*

transaction was buried in oblivion; and I visited the family mansion as usual. I now visit it *again* on friendly terms, for the sake of Flora; and if I am not received on friendly terms, I shall behold my brother no more; though my heart will cling to Flora while there is a pulse of life that beats in my veins."

So deep and earnest had the General been in conversation with his youthful and attentive auditor, that he had been regardless of the ground they had gone over with such rapidity for the last hour; but when the chaise was ascending a steep hill, at a more moderate pace, he suddenly exclaimed;—

"I protest, Henry, we are now within gunshot of Oldstock Hall. The old family mansion is seated on the brow of this stupendously steep hill."

And the General, exchanging his travelling fur cap for his military hat, looked at his watch, and seemed unusually impatient for the moment of his arrival, giving instructions to his young friend how he should conduct himself, when he should introduce him to Sir Oliver, his sister, Miss Lydia Oldstock, and his niece, the pretty Flora.

"For pretty she is, by all the immortal gods and goddesses," cried the General; "but I say, my young Hotspur, beware of sly Cupid! Gad zookers! don't fall in love with Flora; or I must turn about again immediately—quick march!"

The young soldier blushed deeply at the General's remark; but it was not with a dread of any shot being levelled at his heart from the bow of Cupid, under whose soft banners he had never yet enlisted.

At length they came in sight of a prodigious old-

fashioned structure, whose lofty head proudly reared itself above the ancient oaks, which almost on every side surrounded it; and, spite of a soldier's wonted firmness, a glistening tear shone in the eyes of the General, and he was more than once obliged to have recourse to his pocket-handkerchief, which he held close to his face, as the postillions rapidly advanced towards the venerable seat of his ancestors.

"I wish Plato were here to lend me his philosophy on this occasion," uttered the General; but in so evidently a smothered tone of voice, as to betray the emotion he was suffering to his young companion; "I would just borrow it for ten minutes, till my meeting with Sir Oliver was fairly over."

The shades of evening, which had been imperceptibly stealing on, made it almost impossible to distinguish objects very clearly; in addition to which the sky was misty, and there was a slight drizzling rain. So that, when the postillions drew up to the gates of the family mansion, a splendid escutcheon, bearing the arms of Sir Oliver, had actually, at this precise moment, escaped the observation of the General, though it was remarked almost on the instant of their nearer approach to Oldstock Hall, though certainly in silence, by Ensign Conway.

On the bell being rung, no answer was returned; —a second time repeated, met with no better success; and the General's stock of patience being quite exhausted, he desired the postillion to force the gates, which did not appear to be locked, and go up to the hall door, and knock loudly for admittance.

"Gad zookers! knock as if you were going to waken

the dead," vociferated the General; "confound them! are they all asleep at half past six o'clock at night? Zounds, if I get out, I will make them hear me with a vengeance."

The postillion did not spare the knocker, in which he had also the ready assistance of Juba; and in a few minutes a shrill-toned female exclaimed from within—

"Who's there, that dares to come to people's doors to make such disturbance at this lonesome hour of the night? Who's there, I say?"

"A gentleman that belongs to the family," was the reply of the postillion.

"That is a likely story," answered the same shrill discordant voice; "when all the family are dead, and nobody is alive belonging to this house but my Lady, who is gone a visiting. So I shan't let you in, you may depend upon it. I am an old bird, and am not to be caught with chaff, I promise you; a prudent, upright, careful woman, or I should never have been trusted with the care of this house. Aye, you may knock away, I shan't open the door never the more for that, I can assure you."

Away ran the postillion and Juba with this intelligence to the General, who, highly incensed with the old woman's insolence, made but one spring out of the chaise, and the next to the door of the family mansion, where he had already been so ungraciously received, and giving a thundering knock, he applied his mouth to the keyhole, while he loudly vociferated;—

"Mother Mildew, open the door this moment, or by the Lord Harry I will break it asunder, and send it flying about your ears, as clean as a whistle."

"Mercy on us! here will be ravishment and murder, before my mistress comes home," uttered the old woman, apparently now under some dismay; "Dolly, what shall us do, child?"

"I will run up stairs and cover myself all over with the bedclothes," uttered her companion.

Meanwhile the General kept up an incessant and continued knocking, which at last induced the old woman again to exclaim;—

"I tell you that my mistress is not at home, and I am desired to open the door to nobody in her absence. Can't you take a civil answer, whoever you are, pray?"

"Confound your mistress and you too, you old harriden," cried the General, still hammering at the door. "I will soon let you know who I am, if you keep me parleying here much longer. You old Jezabel, don't you remember Hector Oldstock, the dreadnought of the whole family, save Flora. Open the door, you witch; or I will presently refresh your memory in a manner that will not be quite so pleasant to your olfactory nerves. Open the door this instant."

Had a cannon ball pierced the heart of Mrs. Mildew, it would not have operated more forcibly, that when she fairly understood who was the applicant for admission at the door of *Oldstock Hall;* and wide flew the massy bolts and bars to give him entrance there; she curtseying and simpering down to the very ground, and offering a thousand apologies for having so long been mistaken in the sound of a voice, the tones of which were so familiar to her ear.

"But, the Lord be good unto me, who would ever have thought it had been *you,* Mr. Hector," uttered

she; "after the newspapers have so repeatedly proclaimed that you were dead, and gone to your long home!"

"Then the newspapers told a d——d lie," vociferated the General; for he was still under the influence of the direst rage, which occasioned the terrified housekeeper to tremble and shake from head to foot; "I am alive and hearty, Heaven be praised; though confoundedly savage at the treatment I have received, after an absence of ten long years."

"Which I hope you will kindly pardon, considering my ignorance, and my deafness, and my blindness, and that I am nearly seventy years of age, come next Michaelmas, Mr. Hector," cried Mrs. Mildew, in a tone of the humblest supplication, which *last* plea, in some measure, appeased the irritated feelings of the General, and he replied in a more softened accent;—

"Well, well, as you did *not know* that it was Sir Oliver's brother, who is now returned to England a General in the army, but who quitted it ten years ago but a poor Lieutenant, and waited at the door of Oldstock Hall as if he were a petitioner on bounty; as you were ignorant of all this, *Mother Mildew*, why I will freely pardon you, because I do not imagine that you will easily mistake my person again, or my condition."

"A General in the army! My stars and garters, who would ever have thought it!" cried Mrs. Mildew, clasping her hands together, with a mixture of wonder and astonishment, which was at the same time blended with malignant envy, though glossed over with a smile of the most consummate hypocrisy; "but you was

always a brave youth, but wild, prodigious wild; just like Miss Flora."

"Gad zookers! not a word against Flora, Mother Mildew. By the immortal gods I will pulverize every one to atoms that utters a word of Flora. But how is she, the darling? and how is my sister Liddy? and pray how is Sir Oliver?"

"Ah, well-a-day! as if you did not know *where your brother is!*" cried the housekeeper, applying her apron to her eyes, with an air of the most affected concern; "you know where Sir Oliver is gone, don't you, Mr. Hector—*General, I mean?*"

"Aye, Hector General, or General Hector, it is much the same thing," answered the General, scarcely able to resist laughter; "but how the devil am I to guess where Sir Oliver is by the equivocal language which you chuse to adopt, Mother Mildew? he may be gone to heaven, or gone to ——"

"Oh Lord, Sir, how can you think of such a thing," cried the hypocritical housekeeper; "he was too good a man to go any where but to heaven, poor dear soul! Oh he was a thoughtful man! He has left me a matter of twenty pounds a year for my faithful services. Excellent gentleman! how I adore his blessed memory!"

"Doubtless," uttered the General, "he has given you a *memorandum* to commemorate his virtues as long as you live: so now I am clearly to understand, Mother Mildew, that my brother, Sir Oliver Oldstock, of Oldstock Hall, is defunct."

"Alas the day, he is no longer living," cried the housekeeper, pretending to weep; "he was buried in

the family vault this very day twelvemonth, close to the remains of my poor dear Lady."

"Which he was unworthy to possess when living," uttered the General, heaving an involuntary sigh. "Well, Mother Mildew, I will now go and send away the chaise, which has been waiting this hour at the gate, and will attend to your further account of family concerns almost immediately."

CHAPTER II.

"Why makest thou it *so strange?*
She *is* a woman, therefore may be woo'd;
She *is* a woman, therefore may be won;
She *is* a WIDOW, therefore may be lov'd!"

SHAKESPEARE

THE absence of the General from the so greatly astonished and confounded housekeeper, Mrs. Mildew, did not exceed more than ten minutes, so impatient was he to obtain the full budget of the family affairs at Oldstock Hall, now no longer the residence of Sir Oliver Oldstock, and which his sister Lydia (the old maid) had very quietly planted herself into the possession of, without thinking it once necessary to ascertain whether the General was yet in actual existence or not, but which by heirship naturally descended to him, and which nothing could *now* deprive him of.

Sir Oliver having left no male issue to inherit the estate, and though for the sake of Flora the General was willing to make any sacrifices, when he should learn if she was still under the protection of his sister, yet for *that* sister, whose mercenary principles he abhorred, he firmly resolved that he would not give up a single shilling of the property, to which he was now

the rightful heir, merely for the gratification of her greedy and avaricious disposition; and wondering what had become of Flora, he quickly dispatched the chaise from the gates of the family mansion, after having liberally rewarded the postillion for his trouble in having waited so long in attendance; and leaving Juba behind to bring in the baggage, very speedily made his appearance again to Mrs. Mildew, with the young Ensign under his arm, whom he introduced to her, as a brave young officer, who had been the companion of his long campaign, and whom he had now the honour to *protect*.

On which intelligence Mrs. Mildew, who had just been on the point of dropping one of her cringing curtseys, and to address Ensign Conway in the style of one of *Fortune's favourite sons*, drew up her head with a sort of stately formality, the General's last words having sounded somewhat grating to her ears: she immediately concluded that the young soldier was rather dependant on the bounty of his protector, than he (the General) having acquired any pecuniary advantages by affording him the protection of which he seemed so proud; and this supposition induced her to alter her manner towards the young Ensign in a very considerable degree. Pursing up her parched lips, therefore, into what she hoped would be received as a most gracious welcome, she exclaimed, "I protest, young man, you are very fortunate to fall in with the General just as the sun is beginning to shine on the harvest, as the saying is. Yes, yes, it is much better to be born *fortunate* than *rich*. Well, how Miss Liddy

will stare when she comes back to Oldstock Hall, and is told that——"

"That she will no longer remain *mistress there* than her conduct continues to merit that title," cried the General, who had observed the ungracious looks which the old woman had thrown on his young favourite with ill-concealed displeasure. "Miss Liddy will indeed be surprised when she is told this by her brother, and will probably stare quite as much as you do now, Mother Mildew, at hearing so unexpected a piece of intelligence; but, gad zookers! don't let us stand parleying here about what Miss Liddy will say; who the deuce cares a curse what either *she* or *you* may say about the matter. But tell me what is become of my niece Flora, who was the principal cause of my coming hither, and but for whose sake it is more than probable that I should never again have revisited the wooden walls of Old England. Come, stir your pegs, Mother Mildew; first tell me what you have done with that cherub, Flora, and then quickly prepare some refreshment for me and my young friend."

The pencil of Hogarth himself would have but faintly delineated the expression that dwelt on the crabbed and frosty features of Mrs. Mildew, at receiving commands so haughtily expressed, with the slight hint which was also given her by the present heir of Oldstock Hall, that both she and her mistress must regulate their conduct according to his pleasure, or "TURN OUT;" for she well knew that he was of a disposition not to be trifled with, and would never bear the slightest contradiction, when once he had occasion to find

fault; and though she wished him and his young favourite buried beneath the African sands, from which they had so suddenly sprung, and cursed the newspapers for their lying report, this certainly was not a seasonable moment to express her regret at the disappointment, or betray the effects of her ill humour. Besides, self-interest, that arbitrary principle, which ruled every movement of her inmost soul, and governed every outward action, induced her to adopt a very opposite and contrary behaviour than dislike to the now living representative of Oldstock Hall, and to make a virtue of necessity, when there was indeed no other alternative to choose: by which too she might gain some advantages even superior to those she obtained when living under the authority of Sir Oliver, her late master; for the General, though a warm tempered man, was a generous and a kind one; and if she behaved well, might be induced to double the twenty pounds annuity bequeathed to her by his brother.

Dismissing every frown, therefore, from her countenance, she brightened into smiles as quickly as the sun breaks through an envious cloud on a frosty morning, and curtseying down to the ground, begged that the General and the young Gentleman would be pleased to walk into Miss Liddy's parlour, where there was a good fire; and in the mean time she would order the cook to prepare the supper:—

"For there is always something good in the larder," uttered she; "Miss Liddy was always an excellent provider when Master was alive, and now that he is dead, honest Gentleman, she is willing to keep up to the charter. But you was asking about Miss Flora,

General. Oh, my stars and garters! I have such news to tell you about Miss Flora!"

"Out with it, Mother Mildew, out with it, then," cried the General, whose eyes now sparkled with the most lively impatience; "I will have no supper till you tell me all about my dear little Flora."

"*Little, indeed!*" answered the housekeeper, with much difficulty concealing an envious sneer; "she is *great now*, General; a great lady; no less than the wife of my Lord Primrose!"

"What!" cried the General, "my niece Flora the wife of Lord Primrose, the old usurer? Flora married to him! Why, gad zookers! Mother Mildew, he is old enough to be Flora's grandfather."

"Well, General, and suppose that he was," replied Mrs. Mildew, sharply; "it is better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave, I warrant me!"

"I don't know," muttered the General, "I don't know; but I will ask Flora that *precise question* when I see her. January and May, by all that's freezing! Well, Mother Mildew, go on with your budget; let us have the whole of it. So my pretty Flora is now the rosebud that graces the bosom of an old ——. Zounds! I shall get into a passion if I think of it. Well, so Flora is married—and there's an end of it."

"Aye, truly, she *was* married about two years ago, General," rejoined the housekeeper; "but she is now a *Widow*, the widow of Lord Primrose."

To which the General immediately vociferated;—

"The Lord be praised! That's some relief for poor Flora, however."

The manner and voice of the General at this mo-

ment would have provoked the risibility of the gravest philosopher; and Ensign Conway had much difficulty in restraining the strong propensity he felt to laughter; while the hard and frosty features of Mrs. Mildew relaxed into a perfect simper, which was intended for a smile, and she exclaimed;—

"Aye, Mr. Hector—General, I mean—you are still the same wicked, joking man as you used to be when you first came down to Oldstock Hall, dressed in your regimentals, with your hat and feather cocked on one side, on purpose to entrap the hearts of all the young maids in the village; aye, you hav'nt left off your rakish sayings, General."

"Why, I did love the pretty maidens, I will freely own, Mother Mildew," answered the General, winking at Ensign Conway; "he is no man who does not, though he may pretend to be one: but as for entrapping them, as you call it, I will deny the fact *in toto;* for curse me if ever I betrayed a woman in my life. But who on earth shall ever persuade me that my niece Flora can feel regret at the ties of marriage being dissolved by such an event? or that she could ever love a man arrived at his second state of childhood before he married her? The thing is impossible, Mother Mildew, whatever you may think of it; and I have no doubt but Flora is glad to shake her fetters off, which if she wore two years with *such a husband,* must have been heavy enough in all conscience. So, the dear little creature is well and happy, and in the possession of liberty, which is the sweetest charm of existence. Of course the old dotard has left her the whole of his wealthy property."

"Oh dear, yes, to be sure he has," uttered the housekeeper; "and a prodigious fine fortune it is too; no less than a matter of three hundred thousand pounds! My stars and garters! she will never get through it, as extravagant as she is."

"As generous, you mean to say, don't you, Mother Mildew?" cried the General; "that term you know was always misapplied at Oldstock Hall, so I don't wonder at your always having it at your tongue's end. So Flora is extravagant—well, she can afford to be so, cannot she?"

"Aye, truly, she makes the old Lord's money fly," rejoined Mrs. Mildew; "nobody would know Stanmore Priory now, where the butter melts before the sun, as Miss Liddy says."

"Oh, confound what Miss Liddy says," cried the General; "I shall hear enough of her sayings when she returns to Oldstock Hall, and finds me seated in Sir Oliver's easy chair. Well now, Mother Mildew, let us have something to eat and to drink."

"I will instantly attend to your Honour's commands," cried Mrs. Mildew, curtseying all the while.

"And a bottle of claret to toast a bumper to the health of Flora," added the General. "Gad zookers! how I long to see the gipsy! I shall drown her—yes, I know I shall smother the smiling rogue with kisses. But will she smile though? Confound it! If I should be out of my calculation after all. I have drawn the portrait of a little fond innocent, whom I left ten years ago, with rosy cheeks and laughing eyes, and a little curly-headed pole; a mere child, who used to put her snowy arms around my neck, and call me her dear

nunkey. This *was Flora*; but what *is Flora* now? Why, gad zookers! she is now a woman grown, has been a wife, and is now a widow; and all in the space of ten years! I say, Mother Mildew, is Lady Primrose handsome?"

To which the housekeeper replied;

"Lord, General, how can you think of asking such a question? Why, to be sure she is—prodigious handsome! Quite a beauty, every body says in Northamptonshire; and, what is more, every body says that Lady Primrose is the very picture of her uncle Hector. Nay, I have actually heard Miss Liddy say that the eyes of Lady Primrose, which are of a charming bright black, you know, and the nose of Lady Primrose, which inclines rather to the aquiline, is as like yours, when you was a young man, as two peas in a pod."

This was too much for the gravity of the General, and he laughed immoderately. He had stood the attack of many a bold adventure, and received many a shot; but against the artillery of direct flattery he was not proof; and he jocularly exclaimed, as the old housekeeper was about to make her exit;—

"By Jove, then, Mother Mildew, if the family resemblance is half so strong as you mention, it must have been completely erased by this time from the sun-burnt features of Hector Oldstock. No, no! if my niece is so prodigiously handsome, she owes it all to her mother, who was one of the loveliest creatures in existence."

This remark was not made without being followed by a deep sigh. In short, it was very perceptible that the General could never speak of the mother of Flora

without betraying an emotion which his utmost efforts had not the power to conceal: and for more than ten minutes after Mrs. Mildew had quitted the apartment, a silence ensued, which was not interrupted till Juba popped his head in at the door, with the exclamation of—

"Massa, him trunks all safe in him chamber; and Juba come ask Massa if want him things to dress?"

"No, dress the devil," cried the General; "I am dressed enough for the party I am going to meet this evening, I warrant me. Go and sit by the kitchen fire, and warm your nose, Juba, till old Mother Mildew has got the supper ready, and then you shall wait at table, and stand a chance of picking a bone yourself. Aye, Juba, this is England, my boy, where no man is in danger of *starvation*, till he has not a shilling left to help himself, and then he may starve and be ——."

Of course the General did not finish his sentence, for he was not in the habit of swearing, except when he was in the very height of intemperate passion. But Juba chuckled and laughed notwithstanding at his master's jocularity, though he did not indulge this laugh in his presence; but as he posted away to the kitchen, could not forbear muttering to himself;—

"Massa one funny man. Juba love Massa, because when him in big passion wid Juba, him laugh and say him no mean nothing; den Juba laugh too, and den all him passion's over. Massa good, good man; though him *bounce, bounce*, no mean nothing."

No sooner was Juba dismissed, than the General addressed Ensign Conway in the following words;—

"Henry, how farest thee, lad, after being witness to

the long harangue I have had with that old she devil, the housekeeper. Hast not laughed heartily to see her advances and her retreats, her marching and her counter marching, while she thought she was under petticoat government. Aye, Harry, but by the Lord, I soon gave her to understand who stood at the head of the regiment. Well, Henry, here I am, landed once more on the shores of Great Britain, and fairly seated in the old family mansion of my ancestors, which, by Sir Oliver's lucky trip over to the river Styx, is now my own. Henry, congratulate me, my dearest boy, on a disencumbered estate of nearly seven thousand a year, and a General's commission into the bargain. Disencumbered, did I say? Zounds, no! I had forgotten my sister Lydia; and she is an old maid. Gad zookers! she will stick by me as long as I live. So much the worse, for I don't love her, and I shall bear her society with a very ill grace. No matter; there is seven thousand a year to reward me for it; and perhaps Liddy may be improved in her temper. Confound it, no! She is ten years older; and curse me if ever I found a woman to improve with age in all my born days. No matter; the smiles of my lovely Flora shall console me. I shan't trouble Liddy much with my company, I promise her; for to-morrow, yes, gad zookers! to-morrow I will go and see Flora. But why so grave, Henry? Are you afraid of encountering the smiles of the young widow? Or do you imagine that I intend going to Stanmore Priory without you?"

To which the young soldier modestly and ingenuously replied;—

"Believe me, General, that I do not entertain a fear

of either. You are naturally anxious to share your happiness with those who rejoice in your prosperity; and surely none can feel a greater joy than I do now in seeing my beloved patron in the full possession of all his hopes and wishes."

"But I am not in the full possession of all my hopes and wishes, till I have seen Flora," cried the General; "and if, seeing her, I don't like her as well as I did ten years ago, there will be an end of all my hopes and wishes at once, and I will set off for Florence immediately. This is my determination."

"Alas, Sir! and can you indeed cherish a doubt that your niece will not fully answer every fond expectation that you have formed of her?" rejoined Ensign Conway. "And will not the *lovely woman* be equally dear to your affections, as the lovely child, whom you so loved in her infancy? Surely I shall hear you exclaim, Yes, oh yes!"

"But you shall not hear me exclaim so till I have seen her," cried the General; "and then I will tell you what I think of her; because I think it very likely for three hundred thousand pounds to turn the head of any woman, if she had all the wisdom of Plato, and the chastity of Diana. Gad zookers! it would have turned the head of Plato himself. What is philosophy when compared with gold? Then Flora is very young, and, as Mother Mildew tells me, she is very pretty."

"And are youth and beauty points that you would think objectionable in your niece, General?" enquired the Ensign, with a doubting smile.

To which the General immediately responded—

"No, Henry, no; I cannot say they are; for if I

was to say to the contrary, you would naturally think that I was uttering a confounded lie. Notwithstanding which I should love Flora, if she were as ugly as the witch of Endor; for pretty women will sometimes give themselves airs, and torment us poor devils most consummately. Then Flora is a widow; and, gad zookers! her house will be besieged with a medley of lovers from morning till night. Every man likes to attack a widow, and thinks she is fair game in view; and especially when she happens to be young, rich, and handsome."

"My inexperience of the world, General, forbids me from hazarding an opinion on a subject so delicate," uttered the young Ensign, deeply blushing; and the General, laughing heartily, exclaimed—

"Zounds! Harry, you are devilishly afraid of the women. But have a care, boy, when you come in contact with some of the bright-eyed wenches that you will see in the county of Northamptonshire, from whose power you might as well attempt to fly as from a rattlesnake. You may turn, but they will turn again, and never leave you till you are bound in Cupid's rosy fetters, which the smiling rogues will tell you are made with lillies and roses, boy; but beware, Harry, beware of the *thorns* that lurk beneath them."

At this precise moment, Juba announced the supper to be in readiness, and spared the young Ensign from the difficulty which the General's pleasant raillery had imposed on him—that of conversing on a topic, about which he had never troubled his head nor his heart; and on which it was more than probable the most lovely woman in existence would not at this period

have made the slightest impression of a tender nature.

A couple of fine chickens, a neat's tongue, with minced pies, and other delicacies, were nicely dished up, and sent to table, by the order and inspection of Mrs. Mildew, *herself preceding* the repast, bearing two large wax candles, in silver candlesticks, and standing at the entrance of the dining parlour to receive the General and his young favourite as they came in and took their stations at the table.

"General, I hope you will find all things agreeable to your palate," uttered she, curtseying with great formality; "and if not, I hope your honour will speak."

"Oh, never doubt it, Mother Mildew," answered the General, beginning to carve the chickens; "I will speak when I want any thing, never fear; but I dare say we shall manage very tolerably. You have placed an excellent supper before us, and it would be a great pity if we did not endeavour to do justice to it."

Mrs. Mildew now very respectfully retired, and Juba made his appearance with two bottles of wine, and a silver tankard of ale with a toast in it. The General smilingly exclaimed, as he took a hearty draught of it,—

"I see the old girl has not forgotten my favourite beverage—a tankard of ale with a toast in it. Come, Henry, mend your draught, and spare not the claret, of which there is no lack in the cellar. Sir Oliver has left a plentiful supply of the good things of this world, which, though he was never willing that others should enjoy or partake of when he was living, he can have

no objection to now he is dead; for there never was a man that kept up to the old adage better than he did, 'That charity beginneth at home.' And now it beginneth abroad, so there is all the difference between Oliver the deceased, and Hector the living. Juba, you black looking dog, take away the cloth, and put the wine on the table, then go and tell Mother Mildew to give you a good supper, and a mug of English ale, to drink to the health of Lady Primrose, my niece."

"Juba tank, tank Massa, for make him heart wàrm, merry," cried Juba, chuckling at the thoughts of the ale; "no forgeta drink good Massa's health when him swig de ale."

"Nor Lady Primrose; mind that," cried the General.

"No, Massa, me tink of flower den, me tink of de rose," answered Juba, as he made his exit, leaving the General and his young favourite to enjoy an uninterrupted conversation of nearly two hours over their bottle; and as, from the lateness of the hour, it was not likely that Miss Oldstock would return home, having gone to a visit of some distance from Oldstock Hall, and feeling fatigued with his long journey, the General proposed to retire for the night, not being very solicitous or over anxious to obtain a meeting with a sister, who, instead of being rejoiced to see him after an absence of ten years from his native country, was far more likely to lament that the newspapers had so greatly erred in their report of his death, and that she would probably shed more tears over her disappointed hopes than she would ever have done had he actually been extirpated from the race of human beings.

How was it possible for his heart to feel one tender emotion towards such a woman; whose every impulse beat to the tune of self-interest, and whose every action was guided by worldly principles? In short, his sister so completely resembled the late Sir Oliver in parsimony of disposition, that the General, who was exactly its opposite, and had been accused by both of them as being the most wild and extravagant spendthrift in existence, but who was with this character discharging the active duties of humanity, and rendering to his suffering fellow creatures the most benevolent deeds of charity, was at once resolved, on coming into the full possession of the family estate and title, either to divest his sister Lydia of all authority in Oldstock Hall, or to cure her of her parsimonious propensities by portioning her off with but a very small share of that property to which she had now no legal claim. If she was not satisfied with this arrangement, he determined that she should seek a home elsewhere, as he would not be burthened with a sister of whose actions he did not approve.

But why was the General so severe, so bitter against his sister, whose heart was softened into kindness and considerate compassion for every other being? Alas! there was a cause why Lydia was so particularly disliked, a family secret, which, though years and years had passed away, and seemed no more than a terrific dream, which in it had nothing, yet it had never faded on the memory of the injured Hector. He still remembered what share his sister Lydia had in depriving him of the possession of the only heart he had ever prized, of the only woman he had ever loved: and

though he had long since forgiven this outrage done to his feelings, yet time had not consigned to oblivion the remembrance of his wrongs, which the sight of his lovely niece was likely to revive again fresh to his memory; the more especially if she bore so strong a resemblance to her mother: yet the General determined by every effort which philosophy and reason could make use of, to subdue emotions which the meeting with Flora would naturally inspire, and to forget the fatal resemblance which had already cost him so dear.

With these very wise resolutions, the General fell into slumbers of the most pleasing kind; and so did Ensign Conway. The prosperous days which now awaited his benefactor afforded him the most unspeakable happiness; yet we will not pretend to say that in these wild transports of the young soldier, self had no share. Alas! self is inseparable from the human heart; it breathes with every joy, and droops with every tear: and though in some free-born generous spirit it imparts a portion of its interest to aid that of another, it will yet creep to our bosom as if it derived its very existence there, where it perishes not till we are disunited from all earthly things. The youthful Henry caught one spark of its powerful influence; and as he closed his eyes in gentle sleep, was visited by golden dreams; while hope, the young flatterer, smiled in the perspective, and shed a thousand odours from his dewy wings, so lightly pressing his eyelids down, that Henry, though twice called by Juba, to tell him that the General was up and dressed, heard not the welcome summons, till a third time the black shook the curtains, and cried—

"Why you no hearee, Massa Conway, when Juba come call you two tree times? Why you no open him eye?"

Another shake of the curtains at length aroused the young sleeper from his drowsy slumbers, and instantly springing out of bed, he exclaimed—

"Why what a lazy dog I am, Juba!"

To which Juba very quaintly replied—

"Yes, Massa, you lazy dog; you sleep sleep all day long, Juba no call you."

"What! have you called me before, Juba?" enquired the Ensign.

The black chuckled.

"Me call, but you no hearee," cried he. "Massa him say him come give you cold pig, you no come to him breakfast when breakfast ready."

Away marched Juba, after having delivered the General's message; and, ashamed of having been the longest sleeper, the young soldier very quickly posted after him, and made his entrance to the breakfast parlour with a thousand apologies to his patron for having kept him waiting.

"Well, one apology is as good as a thousand," cried the General. "Let us now sit down and attack the hot rolls and hyson tea: not but what I slept pretty soundly myself. A hard day's march could not have done the business better for both you and I, Harry, than the two bottles of claret which we toasted to the health of Flora."

The morning repast was relished with as good an appetite as the one on the preceding night; and just as they had finished, the old-fashioned rumbling family

coach, which had been in use for the last twenty years, in the service of Sir Oliver, drew up to the gates of Oldstock Hall, Mrs. Mildew just having time to pop her head in at the parlour door to announce to the General that Miss Liddy was come. On which he exclaimed—

"Well, let her come; who's afraid? I will give Miss Liddy a warm salutation, if she is not civil, you may depend upon it."

Now whether Miss Liddy received this hint from the accommodating lips of her faithful housekeeper, or whether the intelligence that her brother Hector was arrived at Oldstock Hall, with no appearance of having descended from the grave to pay a visit there, and with all the signs of bearing flesh and blood about him, had so utterly confounded her as to deprive her of the power of language to address him, we cannot determine; but, from some cause or other, it is certain, that when Miss Liddy descended from the coach, and found her way to the parlour, where the General and his young favourite were sitting, no marks of dissatisfaction clouded her brow, or pervaded her countenance; but extending her hand to meet that of her brother, she exclaimed—

"Gracious heaven, brother Hector! Is it you?"

To which the General, in the same tone, replied, but without withdrawing the hand which she had faintly pressed—

"Yes, sister Liddy, it is *me;* and I have ocular demonstration that it is *you.* Ten years absence from this old family mansion have not erased your features from my memory."

The strong emphasis which the General had given

to these words, brought a momentary flush of crimson into the cheeks of Miss Oldstock; but it resembled a flash of vivid lightning—for it instantly disappeared, and left their natural hue, which was pale, and sometimes yellow; for certainly neither rose nor lilly had ever bloomed or wafted their smiling sweetness there.

At length, having seated herself with much difficulty, (for she certainly was under the influence of some fear,) she coldly pronounced—

"Of course Mildew has apprized you of the death of Sir Oliver."

"And of the marriage of Flora," exclaimed the General; "*of course she has. One event* I expected of course. It was in the course of nature that a man arrived to the years of Sir Oliver should die. Man was not born to live for ever, Liddy. But the other event has, I own, filled me with astonishment not to be expressed; for that was a thing cursedly out of the course of nature, to all intents and purposes."

"Lord, brother, I protest I cannot see any thing so prodigiously wonderful in it as you would infer," cried Miss Oldstock, with a very stately look; "except that Flora should have met with such an offer, which her betters would have been very glad to have jumped at—a husband, with a title and a fortune of *three hundred thousand pounds.*"

"A dotard you mean, Liddy," cried the General, laughing; "arrived to his second state of childhood, and wanted a pretty nurse to rock his cradle and sing him to sleep."

"Oh fie, brother," exclaimed Miss Oldstock; "I protest you are quite a libel on the memory of that

dear, good, virtuous man, Lord Primrose. He perfectly adored Flora."

"And did Flora perfectly adore *him?*" enquired the General, still laughing.

"Why as to that, brother,"—answered Miss Oldstock, but there she stopt.

The General now laughed outright, while he uttered—

"No, no, Liddy, persuade me to that, if you can. But come, we won't dispute the point, since the old gentleman is just gone in the nick of time, while Flora is still young and beautiful, for which I have no doubt but she returns him many devout thanks."

"Yes, and it is also very fortunate for Flora," rejoined Miss Oldstock, with a sort of a malicious grin, "that she happened to marry a man of such excellent wisdom, that knew so well how to provide for her after his death."

"Why how the devil could he help providing for her?" cried the General. "There is no great merit in that. Is she not his widow, and must necessarily inherit the whole of his property?"

"Yes—on certain conditions, she will certainly inherit it; but *not otherwise*, I can assure you. Yes, my Lord Primrose knew what it was to marry a young giddy girl like Flora better than to leave his whole fortune at her direction, of which, Heaven help her, she has but a very moderate share. I often lecture her on the vast sums she is squandering away upon a parcel of idle beggars, who are continually infesting Stanmore Priory, under the pretence of being poets, or geniuses, or something of that worthless description.

But it is to no purpose. All my excellent advice is lost upon the wild and thoughtless girl; for though she is a widow, you know, brother, Flora is a mere child—scarcely entered into her eighteenth year—a perfect baby."

It was with no small difficulty that the General had imposed silence on himself during the continuance of this long speech; but the moment that Miss Oldstock had finished her oration, he broke out in the following terms;—

"What! lecture Flora for encouraging genius and literature, and bestowing acts of charity on the poor and the friendless! Why then I must tell you, Miss Oldstock, plainly tell you, that you ought to be ashamed of yourself. What the devil right had you to do any such thing, unless you want to make my niece as cursedly parsimonious and as ignorant as Sir Oliver was and yourself. And how dare you call men of genius and learning a parcel of idle beggars, whose very calling, in their laborious profession, proclaim them to be the sons of industry and merit. If they are poor, gad zookers! 'tis such fools as you that endeavour to make them so; and if they are beggars, it reflects a disgrace, an eternal and foul reproach on the *land* that gives *them birth.* Zounds! I shall choke with passion to hear a woman at your time of life betraying such ignorance, when you are old enough to set a better example to a lovely young creature, just springing into life, when you are going out of it. Instead of which she must needs be lectured for her humanity! Confound your lectures, I say; keep them to yourself. Treasure them up, for the love of Heaven; for curse

me if they will ever do any body *good* but yourself."

The General now tried to take a little breath. Meanwhile Miss Oldstock, who felt herself highly offended with this rebuke in the presence of a stranger, bit her lips, and coloured with vexation, but without advancing a syllable to add to the irritable feelings of her brother, with whose warmth of temper she was pretty tolerably acquainted, and whom, for very many ostensible reasons, she now feared to offend. Wishing to wave the present subject of discussion, she artfully contrived to drop one of her gloves close at the feet of the young Ensign, who immediately picked it up, and presenting it to her with a most gallant and respectful bow, exclaimed ;—

"You have dropt your glove, Madam ; permit me to have the honour to restore it to you."

The glove was accepted with a stately curtsey and a most gracious smile.

"I protest, sir, you are excessively obliging," uttered she ; "but my brother is strangely remiss ; he has not once thought proper to let me know the name of the gentleman from whom I receive this favour."

The General smiled, arose from his chair on the instant, and introducing the young Ensign in great form to Miss Lydia Oldstock, of Oldstock Hall, as Ensign Conway, who had gallantly distinguished himself for his courage and bravery on the Continent, exclaimed—

"And he is my adopted into the bargain, the adopted son of Hector Oldstock. So I have brought a son over to England, after an absence of ten years, ready made. Now, Liddy, do *you know who he is?* I think

I have sufficiently explained myself *in toto*. What *think* you ?"

Miss Oldstock coloured excessively high, and so did the young soldier; for the *one* felt that she could very easily have dispensed with the ready made bargain arriving so inauspiciously at a moment when her brother had just jumped into an estate of seven thousand a year; while the other blushed at the blunt remark of his generous patron, and feared that he would henceforth be considered an intrusive and unwelcome guest by the stately lady of the mansion, by whom he had just been honoured with so condescending a smile.

The dinner being announced at this moment, put an end, for the present, to all uncomfortable and unpleasing reflections.

CHAPTER III.

"The hardships you've endured,
And your long stay beneath the burning zone,
Where one eternal sultry summer reigns,
Have marr'd the native hue of your complexion.
Methinks you look more like a sun-burnt Indian,
Than a Briton." LILLO.

DURING dinner, in which Mrs. Mildew had taken care to give a most excellent specimen of her abilities in the culinary art, the General, whose natural disposition had always a tendency to pleasantry and good humour, when not suddenly checked by a contradiction of his favourite propensities, had entirely recovered the placid smile which shone so brightly in his benevolent features. As the circling glass went round, Miss Oldstock preserved the utmost urbanity of manner towards the young Ensign, which she was now well aware was the only channel through which she could creep into the good graces of her brother; and the General quite forgot that he had addressed a reproachful word to his sister, or that she had given him any cause to do so. After the cloth was removed, and the

dessert put on the table, he took a full bumper, and drank to the success and prosperity of the surviving descendants of Oldstock Hall, while he jocosely exclaimed;—

"And in which I have no doubt but you will join me most heartily, Lydia. And why not? If you have lost the protection of one brother, by that inevitable fate which must at one time or another separate the whole course of nature, you have still a brother left, who is inclined to discharge his duty towards you so long as you continue to merit his affection; and who is also willing that you should remain (as formerly) the mistress of this mansion, provided you do not forget that I am the representative of it, and that I will never sanction certain habits, which, however Sir Oliver might encourage and approve of, I am determined to prohibit. I will never have the doors of hospitality closed against the unfortunate, nor shut to the houseless and unfriended stranger; nor will I allow any domestic belonging to this mansion to turn their backs on the sons and daughters of misery, who may chance to implore compassion and relief. I will not have them rebuked with severity, or treated with unnecessary insult by my servants. Gad zookers! the first that I hear committing this indecency, *turns out*. Do you hear that, Liddy? whether they are male or female; Mother Mildew, and every skin of them! By Jove, I will send them all a packing, on the very instant that I find them disobeying my commands. Now, Liddy, you are apprised of my intentions, and will be enabled to form some correct idea of the future government of Oldstock Hall. Conform to its rules, and you are still the mistress

there—depart from *them*, and you instantly depart from *me*, though you were twenty times nearer in connection to me than you now are. What say you, Liddy, to this plan,—plain but honest? There is little use in garnishing words, when our intention is to deal justly and honourably. I have made you a fair offer; it is your own fault if you reject it; for curse me if it will ever be offered to you a second time while my name is Hector Oldstock. Now or never! as we soldiers say when we are going to besiege a garrison."

Miss Oldstock had sustained the whole of this address with a considerable portion of forbearance, but not without imposing a severe restraint upon her feelings; and while her countenance exhibited the highest symptoms of dissatisfaction, she forced a smile into its natural expression of inflexibility, as she answered her brother in the following terms; being fully sensible, that the slightest opposition to his wishes would, in this case, be wholly unavailing

"Well, brother, if you besiege a garrison when it is willing to surrender, the advantage you acquire over the already defeated party is not very considerable. I protest to you that I have no wish to act contrary to your intentions, any more than I had with Sir Oliver; and you cannot deny that I did discharge my duties faithfully and conscientiously towards him, in the management of all his household affairs. Poor man! I always attended to his commands with the utmost rigidity, and most readily complied with all his wishes, even to a fault, perhaps you will say. I have often refused a morsel of bread, and turned beggars from the door, on purpose to please him."

"The devil you did!" cried the General, looking for a moment angrily towards her.

"But Oliver is dead, you know," rejoined Miss Oldstock, heartily wishing that she had suffered the latter part of her speech to have escaped her memory; "so we will leave his faults and him to rest in the grave."

"Aye, Liddy, you are right; they may rest *there*, and welcome," cried the General; "for by Jove I do not think that any body will go one inch to disturb him from that snug resting place. Well, Liddy, as you had so happy a knack of pleasing Sir Oliver, suppose you now try whether you can please me: though the mode may be a little out of your old system, and may sit devilishly aukward upon you at first, you will grow used to it in time, and it will answer your purpose much better."

"I have no sort of objection in the world, orother," answered Miss Oldstock; "and will enter into the new system whenever you are agreeable."

"Bravo!" cried the General, better pleased with this reply than any she had hitherto made; "give me your hand, Liddy, for I will this moment acknowledge you for the mistress of Oldstock Hall, as long as you maintain sentiments so congenial with my feelings. Henry, hand a glass of wine to my sister, and we will drink to the success of the mutual arrangement between us."

"Which it affords me the highest happiness to have the pleasure of witnessing," modestly uttered the young soldier, as, at the General's request, he replenished his glass at the same instant. "Permit me, Madam, the honour to drink your health, and prosperity to Oldstock

Hall, which, under the auspices of Miss Oldstock, will lose none of its blessings."

"Not if I can help it, I assure you, Sir," replied the old maid, bowing very graciously to the young Ensign, for the elegant compliment he had bestowed

"Now then I am as happy as I possibly can be," cried the General, "*without* having seen my pretty Flora: but, gad zookers! Liddy, you were saying something about the will of her late husband. What! is there any flaw in the indictment?"

"Oh no flaw, brother! it is perfectly correct," answered Miss Oldstock, smiling; "there is only an *if* in the case—a little word, but of mighty consequence in the present instance, I assure you. I protest I cannot help thinking on the *whimsicality* of my Lord Primrose."

"On the rascality of my Lord Primrose, if he has deprived Flora of any part of his property," cried the General; "which by your *hums* and *haas*, Liddy, I begin strongly to suspect.'

"No, I protest I did not mean to insinuate *that*," retorted Miss Oldstock, deeply colouring.

"Then what the devil *do* you mean?" vociferated the General, in a somewhat higher key. "Zounds! why don't you speak plainly as to the point? What are the restrictions imposed upon poor Flora?"

"Lord, brother, you are so warm," repeated Miss Oldstock very calmly.

"To be sure I am," cried the General, "to be sure I am. How can a man be any otherwise than warm, when every feeling about him is roused to energy by

the object nearest his heart? Can'st answer me that, Liddy? Because if not, hold your tongue."

"Well, but brother, if you will but be patient, I will explain all, I dare say to your entire satisfaction," said Miss Oldstock.

"The sooner the better," cried the General, "though curse me if I think so."

"Why, in the first place, every body admits the propriety of the affair," resumed Miss Oldstock; "though Flora was prodigiously mortified when she heard how the will was settled, I promise you; nay, the silly girl even shed tears about it: but Flora is a mere child."

The General was now out of all patience, and thundered out;—

"Why what the devil do you mean, Liddy, by calling a woman a child, who has been a wife, and is now a widow?"

"I mean that Flora is so young," said Miss Oldstock.

"Young!" echoed the General; "confound it all, that is the very reason why my Lord Primrose married her: if she had been as old as *you*, he would not have cared a curse about her."

This was a memorandum which Miss Oldstock by no means wished to be put in mind of in the presence of the young Ensign; and, highly provoked coloured deeply, while she answered;—

"Brother, you are really prodigiously rude."

This instantly excited the risibility of the General, insomuch that he laughed outright.

"Gad zookers!" uttered he, "tell a woman of her

age, and you slip out of her good graces immediately. Well, Liddy, come, I won't remind you of past grievances, for these ten years to come, and by that time I have a shrewd guess you won't want to be put in mind of them at all. Now for Lord Primrose, if you please. You admit the propriety of his conduct to Flora with respect to his will, you say."

"Certainly I do," replied Miss Oldstock, with some symptoms of asperity; "for how did my Lord Primrose know, when he departed this life, that Flora would not marry again?"

"And he must have been a cursed old fool, if he had not imagined that long ago," cried the General. "Marry again! Why to be sure she will, and the sooner the better. What are widows good for, I should be glad to know, when they are both young and handsome, but to marry again? Liddy, you talk like a simpleton."

"And you talk profanely, brother, quite profanely. I protest I am shocked to hear you," said Miss Oldstock, drawing up her long scraggy neck with a formality which she intended to be taken for maiden modesty. "I say that my Lord Primrose has acted like a most discreet and prudent gentleman; so has wisely appointed a guardian over the immense property he has bequeathed to a young and giddy girl, who would probably, but for this excellent prohibition, have thrown it away on some young adventurer of fortune, who would ask her to marry him only for the sake of her riches. And how can you blame my Lord Primrose, brother? I protest that his conduct is the most praiseworthy that ever I heard of. Consider what a prodi-

gious fortune he has left behind him; three hundred thousand pounds, and Stanmore Priory into the bargain, which is like a palace! Now what a crying sin and shame it would be if Flora was to throw all this away upon some idle beggar."

"Confound me, if I think there would be any sin at all in the business," cried the General, "if the beggar, as you call him, were meritorious, and worthy of the gift. But prithee, Liddy, leave off sermonizing, and tell me the nature of the point in question. Who is the guardian that the old Argus has left centinel over his property, and what power is he to have over Flora?"

"Why she is to obtain the consent and approbation of *this guardian* before she makes a *second choice;* that is, if Flora marries again, she forfeits the third of the property bequeathed to her by her late husband, if it does not meet with the approval, nay with the absolute *consent* of the *guardian* whom he has appointed; but, if she obtains the consent of Lord Arundel, she enjoys the whole of the property with *her second husband,* let him be *who he will.* Now, brother, do you understand the matter?"

"Yes, I begin to smell a rat," uttered the General; and a precious pretty piece of business it turns out for poor Flora, after all. So she is to marry an old gouty curmudgeon, to whom she has been a nurse for the whole course of a honeymoon, only to swallow a bitter pill at the end of it, which may chance to stick in her throat and choke her. Curse on such matrimony, I say, and on such frosty-nosed old bachelors, who have as much occasion for young wives as a frog has for a

side pocket. Harry, didst ever the like? So this wise guardian, I suppose, who is to *will* the *inclinations* of poor Flora, is the very counterpart of Lord Primrose himself, and will give his consent to *no choice* under *sixty*; and in the very natural supposition that Flora may marry a younger man, the old rogue sacks the one third of the property, on the pretext that the man whom Flora makes choice of does not meet his approval. A pox of such guardians, I say. I see plainly how the case stands, Liddy; and I don't in the least hesitate to pronounce that Lord Primrose was a d——d arbitrary scoundrel to enforce any such laws, and impose any such restrictions on a young and beauteous creature, to whom he was far fitter to be the grandfather than the husband. But I will see Flora, and give her a bit of advice. I will send all the guardians in the world to old Harry before they shall control the liberty of my niece, or imprison the inclinations of a free born Englishwoman. Curse me, if I don't persuade her to marry directly, if she has a mind to it, on purpose to disappoint the selfish arbitrary principles of a cursed old dotard, who, because he could not enjoy happiness himself with a young and lovely wife, must needs put a choke-pear in her way, to prevent her from enjoying it with any body else. Do you call this liberality? Is this generosity? Is this the noble and distinguishing mark of a man's character? Answer me that, Liddy. If a woman marries a man, and discharges her duty conscientiously towards him as a faithful virtuous wife, while he is living, does it follow that she is to be bound in restrictions after his death? No, by Jove; neither shall Flora. I am her uncle, and

I will see no man living impose on her while my name is Hector Oldstock. Have you seen this guardian, Liddy?"

"Lord, brother, how should I see him," cried Miss Oldstock, "when he resides in a foreign country! Lord Arundel has not been in England for several years; but report speaks highly of him with respect to his morals, and the probity of his principles: he is a man of learning, they say too, though quite a misanthrope in his way of living, with some odd and particular habits, which, though young, render him a little singular in these polite and fashionable days."

"So much the better; I do not at all dislike this particular of his character," cried the General; "nor have I any objection to hear that he is also young; he will make the more allowances for poor Flora. He must, however, be somewhat of an extraordinary favourite with the old dotard, to appoint such a person-age the guardian of his young and lovely wife."

"So Flora thinks," said Miss Oldstock; "for it is singularly strange that he never once mentioned the name of Lord Arundel to her when living, though so expressly particularized in his last will and testament; and Flora has taken such a prodigious dislike to this Lord Arundel, you cannot imagine: she absolutely trembles and turns pale at the very thoughts of his returning to this country, which they say will be very shortly. Now, I say, this is very wrong, brother; it is not the man's fault, because Lord Primrose chose to invest him with so high an authority, yet he may not be so very formidable as she supposes."

"No, there is a doubt of that certainly," cried the General; "but can you wonder, Liddy, at the natural

repugnance she must feel at beholding a man to whom she is bound under such severe restrictions? But I will make enquiries about this Lord Arundel; and if I find him worthy of the confidence which is reposed in him, I shall have less to regret on the account of poor Flora, whom I am fully resolved to visit to-morrow, let the consequence be what it will."

"Lord, brother, do you know that it is nearly a journey of fifty miles to Stanmore Priory?" uttered Miss Oldstock. "You would not get there in the old family coach in less than two days; and I protest that Sir Oliver's horses are none of the fleetest."

"That I should probably conjecture," cried the General, laughing; "for the poor devils have been starved to death in his service, so we need not wonder that there is not a morsel of flesh left on their bones; but curse me if I intend to have any thing to do with the old family coach, or Sir Oliver's horses either. No, Liddy, you need not fear that, for I would not be bound to travel at the snail's gallop you mention, no, not even to see Flora. No, *dispatch* is the word of command for me. I shall order a chaise and four to be ready at the gates of Oldstock Hall by break of day, and tell them to drive like fury, and never to stop one moment till they reach Stanmore Priory. Gad zookers! there will be no rest now till I have seen Flora."

"Whom it is very probable you may not see when you do arrive at the Priory," cried Miss Oldstock, with an envious sneer, though unwilling to betray any symptoms of jealousy of her young and beautiful niece in the presence of her brother: but jealousy and envy can seldom succeed in deception; for like the poisoned

adder in the bush, it only watches for an opportunity to spit out its venom, and to sting you if it can. "Flora is always gadding and gossiping somewhere or other," continued Miss Oldstock; "never at home, as a prudent discreet woman ought to be, who has so lately buried the poor dear man, who has left her such a prodigious fortune. I say, brother, that it is not a decent thing."

"But then, Liddy, you are to recollect that Flora is a mere child," answered the General; "it was only a few minutes ago that you allowed her to be such, and now you are attaching faults to her which belong to the most general part of your whole sex. Where are the women who are not fond of gadding and gossiping, as you call it, whenever they have an opportunity? and curse me if I see any harm in it, while they are in good company, which I dare say is the case with Flora, with respect to the society she mixes with at Stanmore Priory, of which I shall very shortly have occular demonstration."

"I protest, brotner, I can say but little about that," cried Miss Oldstock; "for I have visited Flora but twice since the death of my Lord Primrose, and both times we unfortunately differed in opinion on several subjects. Lady Primrose thought she was right, and I thought she was wrong; and I have never since repeated my visit, nor ever been invited by her offended Ladyship to the Priory."

The General having observed an unusual expression of severity in the pouting lip of his sister, during the course of this speech, very deliberately exclaimed—

"And perhaps you don't *deserve* to be invited *there*.

What the devil business have you to meddle with matters that don't concern you? Zounds! did not the girl marry an old gouty Peer on purpose to please her father; and *now she is a widow*, has she not a right to make a *second choice*, on purpose to please herself; in which it appears that *even now* she is to be restricted from enjoying a *third part* of her *property*, by her so doing? So *the poor dear man* was determined to be a *match* for her at last. Notwithstanding the prodigious fine fortune he has left behind him, he was a selfish, mercenary mongrel after all."

Miss Oldstock knew that to oppose the sentiments of her brother would not answer her purpose half so well as a general subscription to all he uttered, though expressly contrary to hers, and therefore preserved a silence, which, on the present occasion, so exceedingly became her situation at Oldstock Hall.

Tea and supper were concluded with the utmost harmony, and without a dissenting voice on either side, than merely when the General and Ensign Conway were retiring to their chambers for the night, Miss Oldstock exclaimed—

"Well, brother, I suppose your return from the Priory is quite uncertain; so of course I shall not expect you till I precisely see you."

"Why that will entirely depend upon the reception that Lady Primrose will give me," cried the General, with a smile; "you know it is ten years since she beheld me, and she was then a child in reality; she may very probably not remember her *poor old nunkey* again. Besides, Flora heard of my death in the newspapers, you know, and very naturally conceives there is no

such being in existence as the fond uncle, of whose heart she was the darling."

"Then you must refresh her memory, as you did mine, brother," cried Miss Oldstock, with an affected smile of good humour; and wished him a good night, while she curtseyed to the young Ensign with an air of overstrained condescension, which, at any other moment, would have excited the risibility of the General. But perceiving there was a determination on the part of his sister to enter on the new system of pleasing him, he readily excused all her other failings; and the "good night" was not only cordially returned by him, but he added to it, "*God bless you, Liddy*, till we meet again."

The chaise and four having been punctually ordered to attend, the General and his young companion, with Juba mounted on the box, (after the old manner,) set out at half past six the ensuing morning for the mansion of Lady Primrose, with spirits so elated, and a heart beating with so much tumultuous joy at the expectation of seeing his beloved niece, that wherever they stopt to change horses, he made the most particular enquiries about Stanmore Priory, and the character of the late Lord Primrose, but without obtaining much satisfactory intelligence; so various and contradictory were the reports given of the deceased Lord, whose extensive property had rendered him an object of no inconsiderable consequence throughout the country and the adjacent villages. Those to whom he had been liberal, spoke in terms highly favourable of him; while those towards whom he had acted in a parsimonious manner, represented him to be an arbitrary ty-

rant, who did not deserve a tear to be shed over his remains, and whose loss would scarcely be regretted by his dearest and tenderest ties, much less by a young and beautiful wife, whom he had married out of caprice, and afterwards repented of, by the clause he had so ungenerously made in his will. These were the reports which reached the ears of the General long before he arrived at the magnificent mansion of his niece; but they did not appear to have any tendency to check the hilarity of his spirits, which, as they proceeded at a very rapid pace nearly to the last stage, grew beyond all bounds; for ever and anon he rapturously exclaimed to Ensign Conway—

"Now then, Henry, for a sight of Flora. Gad zookers! I wonder how the young slut will receive me. Zounds! if she looks like her mother, I shall devour her with kisses."

"No doubt but the happiness on *both sides* will be mutual," answered the Ensign, not without feeling some symptoms of curiosity himself to behold an object of whom he had heard so much.

At length the beautiful sloping primrose banks, by which the Priory was surrounded, appeared in view, in the midst of which reared the lofty turrets of Stanmore Priory.

There was nothing gloomy in this edifice, nor Gothic in its appearance, except that the architecture and workmanship were remarkably beautiful, singularly curious, and highly finished; and there was rather a sublimity in it than dreary or solitary, from the ancient turrets, which, collectively and from its immense structure, would otherwise have seemed more suitable for

the habitation of a body of monks, than the residence of a young and beautiful female.

Immediately within the gates of this magnificent mansion was a lovely lawn, the sides of which were tastefully planted with the most odoriferous shrubs and flowers, which emitted the most delicious and balmy fragrance throughout the air; near to which was a paddock, where two asses with their little foals were left at full liberty to indulge themselves in the plentiful supply of pasture which the blooming hedges and fields so abundantly afforded them at this delightful season of the year, when spring had just began to wear her sweetest livery of vernal green.

A sumptuous escutcheon, bearing the arms of the illustrious Lord, was placed directly in front of this magnificent abode, in which, however, the calmest tranquillity seemed to reign at the moment that the postillions drew up to the gates, which were immediately opened by an old grey-headed porter; and it was then that the General put his head out of the chaise window.

"Is Lady Primrose at the Priory?" demanded he; but in so evidently a smothered tone of voice, that the porter immediately began to survey him with the most scrutinizing attention, while, bowing most respectfully, he replied—

"Yes, Sir, my Lady is at home."

"And disengaged from company?" cried the General, still more considerably agitated than before.

"My Lady is seldom engaged with company, and there are none now at the Priory," was the reply.

"So much the better," cried the General; "then

go in and announce my arriva. immediately to your Lady. Tell her that a Gentleman, newly come from India, is desirous of being admitted to her presence without further ceremony.

The order was instantly obeyed. The postillions proceeded with the chaise to the entrance of the hall, and the General alighted with his young friend, on whose arm he was obliged to lean for support, so considerably were his feelings wrought up to an excess of sensibility, which was a mixture of pain and pleasure hard to be described, and to which words could give no expression.

A servant in a plain livery preceded the porter, with a message from his Lady to beg that the Gentleman would immediately walk up, and the General ascended the staircase with a tottering step, while that of the young Ensign was scarcely more firm; for he felt that if the General would not be received as a welcome visitor there, how far more intrusive a guest would he be considered by the beautiful mistress of so magnificent an abode, who, presenting herself at the door, had gracefully curtseyed on their entrance, and pointing to chairs, begged that they would immediately be seated. But notwithstanding that she exhibited a countenance expressively lovely and beautifully animated, her complexion had evidently turned paler as she happened to glance her sparkling dark eyes towards the General; and there was an air of timidity and embarrassment about her as she tremulously pronounced—

"Your return to England is somewhat sooner than you intended—than I—I expected, my Lord, is not it?"

"Or probably wished, my Lady," cried the General, half smiling, instantly perceiving that she had mistaken him for her guardian, Lord Arundel, towards whom she had taken so invincible a dislike.

It immediately occurred to the whimsical humour of the General, that for a few moments he would encourage the mistake, were it only to learn her real sentiments on the subject, and produce an agreeable surprize on her feelings, when he should declare himself to be *that personage*, to whom, ten years ago, she gave the appellation of *dear Nunkey*.

While deep blushes crimsoned the face and neck of the lovely young widow, the General added to his former speech—

"Yes, I have no doubt, Lady Primrose, but I have arrived here rather unopportunely, and that I shall be considered at the Priory an intrusive kind of a visitor; but I was anxious to see you, exceedingly anxious, after what I have heard respecting the death of my Lord Primrose; so am come hither an uninvited guest, nearly a journey of fifty miles, post haste too, hardly stopping to change horses once by the way—did we, Henry? By the bye, I am cursedly remiss in not having introduced this young Gentleman before,—Ensign Conway, Lady Primrose."

The embarrassed Henry (for never had he felt so embarrassed before) immediately arose, and bowed to the graceful curtsey made to him by the young widow, who, in a voice of the most fascinating sweetness, exclaimed—

"Indeed, my Lord, I am very glad to see you and your young friend, whatever you may think to the con-

trary. I am always glad to see my husband's friends, and happy to make them welcome, whenever they do me the honour of visiting the Priory; and it would be very strange indeed if I did not include my Lord Arundel among the number of them."

This was uttered with an air of such smiling sweetness, and with so much simplicity and native ingenuousness of disposition, that the General half repented of his whimsical stratagem to deceive her. Besides he could not take his eyes from her a single moment; and the earnestness with which he regarded every lineament of her inexpressibly lovely countenance, added to the deep blushes which had already tinted the complexion of the lovely widow; who, having ordered in refreshments of every kind, very cordially invited her guests to partake of them, while she smilingly added—

"I hope your Lordship will excuse every want of etiquette that you see here; for indeed I am totally unacquainted with the manners of fashionable life. I have frequently asked my Lord Primrose to instruct me in those matters, in which I confessed myself so profoundly ignorant; and what do you think his reply was, my Lord? It was truly laughable; and I protest I cannot help laughing when I think of it. 'Flora, you will always please me more in your own native character, than by studying all the etiquette in the whole fashionable world.' So what could I do, you know, my Lord, but study to please my husband?"

"And did your husband study to please you?" enquired the General, in so comic a tone, and with such an archness of expression, that the lovely widow had

some difficulty in suppressing her risibility, when replying—

"Yes, I believe he did; he was very kind and indulgent, though a little odd in his manner of shewing it."

"Cursedly odd indeed," cried the General, betraying at this moment an involuntary warmth, which he seemed to have no power of commanding; "especially in that last singular proof he has given you of the generosity of his kind indulgent disposition—I mean his last will and testament, Lady Primrose."

A lovely blush suffused the transparent cheek of the fair widow, and for a moment she looked serious, while she replied—

"My Lord, you are surely jesting if you imagine that I have any right to disapprove of any proceeding of my Lord Primrose. I never did—I never will. I was very young when he married me. I am not a great deal older now—perhaps am not more wise, and certainly am as much a stranger to the world as I was then. It was a considerable property to leave in the hands of a giddy girl like me; and if he thought proper to appoint a guardian over it, more discreet, I ought not to censure the propriety of his conduct, who must in the end be benefited by such an arrangement."

"Provided that you marry to please your guardian," cried the General, smiling; "and that your *second choice* is worthy of his approval."

"Certainly, my Lord," uttered the lovely widow; "but I am in no hurry for *that*, and perhaps may never make a second choice at all. I am sure I have seen no one that I like better than my Lord Primrose; but when I do I will instantly acquaint you, my Lord."

This was uttered with a sportive smile; and the dimple at the corner of one of the prettiest mouths in the world was conspicuously displayed.—The General could hold out no longer.

"Yet with all this urbanity of disposition, with which your Ladyship appears to be so peculiarly gifted," cried the General, "I do not believe, Lady Primrose, that you will consult this guardian at all in the business; that is, if you study your own happiness, of which no guardian in the world can be a better judge than yourself."

"My Lord, as the friend of Lord Primrose, methinks you are adopting a strange mode of addressing me," said the lovely widow; "I will not presume to say that it is improper, but you will allow that it is somewhat singular, after the very great confidence he has reposed in you in such an affair, and to which you will pardon me if I do not listen with toleration. I respect the memory of my late husband, and must not hear any censure passed on his conduct."

"I am astonished! I am perfectly confounded!" cried the General; "and shall never credit any report prejudicial to the character of the late Lord Primrose as long as I live."

"How! my Lord," uttered the widow; "and were you not perfectly acquainted with the character of my late husband before you came hither. You surely cannot be ignorant of the principles of a man, who has, in preference to all others, appointed you the guardian of his property, and invested you with some authority, even over his wife. Have the goodness to explain this seeming mystery, so apparent in your conversation, in

your manners, and in your very looks. Surely I am addressing Lord Arundel, the confidential and intimate friend of Lord Primrose; or if not, I am grossly imposed on by an unnecessary, and, I must own, a cruel deception: and yet your countenance, at this moment, confesses the strongest interest in my fate."

"Yes, Lady Primrose, a much stronger and warmer interest than you are aware of," uttered the General, with considerable agitation; "and curse me if I can keep the secret any longer; my heart has been bursting with it ever since I came into the room. No, child! no, Flora! I am no more Lord Arundel, the guardian of your late husband's property, than that young gentleman is, whom you now see sitting before you; nor did I ever behold Lord Arundel or Lord Primrose in my born days. Yet I profess myself to be the guardian of Flora, notwithstanding; aye, and the tenderest guardian (now that you have no longer a husband) in existence—one who loves you dearer, better than life, for that I could resign for your sake—one who, but for *you*, would never have returned to Oldstock Hall, after being absent for ten years from his native country—an old soldier, who, in all the hardships of a long campaign, has never once forgot the cherub lips that used to address him by the fond and endearing title of her *dear nunkey*."

"Oh, merciful heavens! are you then my uncle Hector?" cried the lovely widow, gazing intently on the fine, noble, benevolent, and ingenuous countenance of her amiable relative, and in the next moment bursting into an involuntary shower of tears; "he whose death I have so long mourned with all the effusions of artless

grief from the bosom of an affectionate child. The almost certain conviction of your death, which was several times publicly announced in the newspapers, taught my father, as well as myself and my aunt Lydia, to imagine that you were no longer in existence; but indeed, indeed, child as I was, I had never forgotten you, and oh how do I rejoice to see you now! Let my full heart acknowledge the truth of the assertion, you are still my *dear dear nunkey!*"

Notwithstanding the presence of the young soldier, the lovely widow rushed into the extended arms which were open to receive her, while the General, to use his own phrase, almost devoured her with kisses. At length calmer moments succeeded to the tumultuous tide of joy, which completely overpowered the agitated feelings of both the niece and the uncle.

Lady Primrose, retiring only a few moments to order supper and bedchambers to be prepared for the reception of her unexpected guests, left the General to converse with his young companion, and to recover the unusual flutter of spirits he had been thrown into by seeing the only object in creation that he passionately regarded; and turning towards Ensign Conway, who had by no means been an insensible witness of the meeting between these two amiable and affectionate relatives, he rapturously exclaimed—

"Now, Henry, you behold me the happiest dog in existence. I have seen Flora, and have not been disappointed in my expectations; for curse me if she is not the sweetest creature I ever beheld in my born days."

"And did not I tell you, General, that you would

not be disappointed?" answered the young soldier; "but indeed while you were sustaining the supposed character of Lord Arundel, I endured much anxiety for the extremely awkward and delicate situation in which Lady Primrose was placed, and I assure you felt considerably relieved when an understanding between both parties was perfectly established."

"And by Jove you could not feel more pain than I did," cried the General; "for whenever I beheld the dear angel changing colour, and trembling beneath the scrutinizing glance with which I surveyed her, she reminded me so strongly of her beauteous mother, that I could scarcely resist the natural impulse I felt to clasp her in my arms, and tell her that I was her own *dear nunkey* come to life again. However, I don't repent—I don't repent of the little stratagem I played upon her in the least, I assure you; for I have drawn from her artless lips a true confession of what light she considered the conduct of her husband with respect to his last will and testament, and the nature of her real sentiments towards Lord Arundel, of whom you perceive she is inclined to judge favourably."

"And probably has no particular aversion to, after all," replied the young Ensign.

To which the General answered—

"It does not appear like it; and Liddy has been telling me a parcel of cursed lies, not only with respect to this circumstance, but to my niece having the giddiness and flightiness about her, which she pretends to say is the natural tendency of her disposition; but I say it is no such thing, Henry; and Flora has more good sense in her little finger than my sister Lydia ex-

hibits at twice her age, with twenty times more her share of prudence and discretion: but what can you expect from an old maid? and my sister Liddy is one to all intents and purposes. Answer me that, Henry; what can you expect from an old maid, but ill nature, scandal, envy, and jealousy of all descriptions?"

To which Henry smilingly replied—

"With the utmost deference to your superior judgment, General, I would say, that old bachelors are not much better thought of, were not you a striking exception to the general observation."

CHAPTER IV.

"When we say agreeable figure, distinct from beauty, we feel a symmetry, of which we know not the rules, a secret harmony of person we cannot define." ROCHEFAUCAULT.

"Let us not regret that we cease to be enamoured of our own charms, since we shall become more susceptible of the cheerful beauties of that playful virtue, which gives social intercourse to all its endearments; and what we lose in pride will be amply repaid in pleasure."

WHEN the lovely widow recovered from the first flutter of spirits in which she had been thrown by the unexpected sight of an uncle whom she had long lamented as being numbered in the bills of mortality, and from the agreeable disappointment in not finding in him her so greatly dreaded and certainly her very much disliked guardian, Lord Arundel, she appeared, on her return to her guests, in her native character, the child of nature and simplicity; in which had art been able to assist, she would have been robbed of the sweetest charm that rendered both her person and her manners so exquisitely enchanting.

Some of our fair and gentle readers may wish to know something of the outward semblance of so young a widow, whose history is to furnish, in the succeeding

pages, so many lessons to those whose destiny in life may be correspondent with her own. Laborious has been the task of the authoress to render that history worthy the attention of that helpless and defenceless part of her sex, which gives her so strong a claim to the protection and kindness of the opposite one; and to prove that flowers of the most lovely blossom may wither and fade, nay, eventually perish, if not supported by the genial smile, which can only be reflected by the pure and sunny beam of virtue's resplendent ray, and the innate principles of an incorruptible heart, which it is impossible to pervert by any worldly sophistry or false doctrine or precepts, when formed by that universal feeling, which is superior to all,—the love and reverence of Him only who has created us, and by whom all the present and future events of our lives are especially directed.

Flora had been thus taught and thus prepared for every succeeding change that might happen to her; but by whom had she been prepared and so taught? Not by that common parent to whom she owed her being; not by Sir Oliver, her father, whose mercenary principles extended no further than to the limits of this world's earthly space, had her thoughts been directed. Nor was it to her husband that she was indebted for this enlightened, and the purest and happiest part of her existence; for Lord Primrose, though he was passionately fond of his young and lovely wife, was not a man who had ever, in the course of his whole existence, bestowed a thought on futurity, or given himself any trouble of enquiring by what grand and universal source he became possessed of those blessings he en-

joyed. It was sufficient for him to know, that he did enjoy them; and he neglected to thank the bounteous hand from whom he received them, till the messenger of death too suddenly apprized him that he was no longer to boast of the advantages which the possession of riches were alone to give him, and that life was not to be purchased by their dominion, but that he must yield all, whether ready or not ready, to the supreme command of the Being, who makes men poor or rich, according to his unerring wisdom.

So suddenly called away from all his earthly views and prospects, it was no wonder that his Lordship endured the most violent struggles between him and his most mortal enemy, to whose invincible power his resistance was feeble and unavailing; and he employed his few short moments, not in preparing to meet the awful tribunal before which he was so shortly to appear, but in settling and arranging the vast treasure he had so unwillingly left behind him in the possession of the young and beautiful creature, whom, while he lived, he had regarded with the most enthusiastic affection, but whom, now he was going to leave her, he envied the possession of enjoyments, of which he was no longer to have a share. That she might make a second choice imprudently, was uppermost in the thoughts of Lord Primrose, even in the very last moments of departing life; hence he made that clause in his will, which forbade her to marry without the consent of the guardian that he appointed over her, on forfeiture of the third part of the property that he died possessed of.

Flora saw no more of her husband after this clause

in his will was made, till he approached the period of his dissolution; but then, unlike other young and beautiful wives, *so married* and *so left*, she was inconsolable when she heard that no hopes were entertained of his Lordship's recovery; and in spite of every effort to detain her, rushed to the bed-side of her expiring husband, took his clay-cold hand, pressed it to her bosom, and in a voice interrupted only by sobs, entreated him to name every wish, every last request that it was now or ever would be in her power to grant after his demise.

But the fatal will was made, and could not be recalled, which seemed to doubt the justice of this lovely young creature towards him; and his Lordship had only power to pronounce his blessing upon the beauteous head that so piously bent over him, ere he finally closed his mortal career. When a decent time had elapsed after his Lordship's decease, and the will was thought necessary to be perused by the proper witnesses, what were the mortifying sensations of this amiable creature to find that her husband had not had sufficient confidence in her, without appointing a guardian over the property which he could no longer enjoy, and without whose consent she was forbade to marry again, or lose a third of the vast treasure that he had left behind him—a guardian, too, whom she had never seen, nor ever heard mention of by her husband when living; and now that he was dead, she was to regard him as the only being she had to fear! It was no wonder then that the name of this Lord Arundel was always accompanied with a sensation of terror and dislike that she could not get the better of, and that she had changed colour when her uncle, General Oldstock,

under that assumed character, so suddenly paid her a visit at Stanmore Priory.

Not that Flora, after a due consideration, had not before this been perfectly reconciled to the will of her late husband. She had fled for consolation, in the first moments of her grief, where she had always been accustomed to find it—to the parsonage-house, where lived the good and worthy Rector of Stanmore, her early friend, and instructor in the days of her childhood; and to him and his excellent wife she was indebted for the formation of that pure and unsophisticated turn of mind, and humble and pious disposition, which never afterwards could be perverted from its natural bias.

It was under the care of Mrs. Evelyn that the little Flora had been placed, shortly after the death of her mother; that lady keeping a private seminary for the education of young ladies; Miss Oldstock alleging to her brother, Sir Oliver, that it would be the most proper place for Flora till she arrived at the years of maturity; and that for her own part, she had quite enough to do in the establishment of his household concerns, without superintending the education of a young and growing girl, who was fitter to be kept at school, and *out of harm's way*, than to have private masters at Oldstock Hall, who would teach her nothing but vanity; and that the pastor's wife would instruct her much better, and on far more reasonable terms. This last argument prevailed with Sir Oliver more than any other to send his only child from her paternal home, because it would cost him less money; and this to Sir Oliver was a weighty consideration: although a Baronet with seven thousand a year, he could not bear

the thoughts of throwing it away on the education of his daughter, whose uncommon loveliness of person would, he imagined, get her a husband without costing him any thing at all. The result was, that the voice of his sister Lydia was duly attended to, and Flora was sent to school without further delay, where she remained under the care of Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn, without any particular enquiries being made about the lovely girl, till she had nearly attained her sixteenth year. Her affectionate aunt had indeed twice or thrice paid a visit to Stanmore, in the course of that time, to pay the expences of her schooling, and other sundry ones incurred at the house of her preceptress; and Sir Oliver having received a satisfactory account of the health and improvement of his daughter from the mouth of the oracle, his sister, was in no other respects solicitous about her, till an incident occurred, which made him exceedingly anxious to remove his daughter to Oldstock Hall, where she would be more frequently seen by Lord Primrose, to whose estates he had lately been appointed the steward. As his Lordship was almost in his dotage, and had more than once seen Flora, and passed the highest encomiums on her beauty, he did not doubt but a more intimate acquaintance would secure to Flora the conquest of his Lordship's affections. This hint was whispered in the ear of his sister Lydia, who approved of the design.

"You are prodigiously acute, brother," cried she; "and I protest, though I did not like to mention it, that it was a thought that entered my pericranium long ago, that Lord Primrose, being now in his dotage, is

more likely to make a fool of himself than at any other time; and what an excellent match it would be for Flora, if she could once get him into a humour to make her an offer."

"Yes, but would Flora herself accept of him for a husband?" replied Sir Oliver; "I doubt we should have some difficulty in persuading the little perverse hussey that old husbands are as agreeable as young ones; and that she would be quite as happy with Lord Primrose as with a youth of her own age. Girls, you know, Liddy, at her time of life, are——"

"Mere babies, brother," cried Miss Oldstock; "and are no more capable of judging for themselves than the child unborn; and pray who are so proper to govern them as we who are come to years of discretion? Besides, it would be prodigiously absurd for you to ask Flora what she likes, when the silly girl does not know herself; and were I you, I would do no such thing, I promise you; I would say, 'There is the man whom I appoint to marry you, and marry him you shall, whether you like it or not.'"

"Well, well, Liddy, I will turn it over in my mind, and have her home immediately. Let me see, how old is Flora, Liddy?"

"Why, Lord, brother, how can you think of asking such a question?" uttered Miss Oldstock. "Who ought to know your daughter's age better than you, I should be glad to know? But as I should guess, Flora will be just sixteen, come next May."

"And Lord Primrose has entered his sixty-fourth year," observed Sir Oliver, somewhat dryly; "I must

needs own that the disproportion is very great, and Flora will be a little startled at receiving the addresses of so antiquated a lover."

At which Miss Oldstock, disdainfully tossing her head, exclaimed, "You seem to take it greatly to heart about what Flora may think, as if the thoughts of such a chit were of any consequence at all. Don't every body marry their daughters now-a-days without consulting their inclinations in the business?"

"Why it is certainly true that marriages are now become a mere matter of form," said Sir Oliver, laughing; "which is one reason why divorces so immediately succeed them."

"In short, marriage is a necessary evil, brother," answered Miss Oldstock; "or who would be plagued with matrimony at all. Well, have you determined on taking the girl from school? I protest when I saw her last, I was ashamed to see her in frocks, she looked so prodigiously womanly; and Mrs. Evelyn then observed to me, that she thought it high time for Miss Flora to finish her education. What say you, brother, if we take a trip over to Stanmore, and bring her away with us to-morrow?"

To this proposal Sir Oliver did not think it quite expedient to make any sort of objection, or to oppose his darling sister in a plan which her whole heart was set upon.

Flora was brought to her paternal dwelling, beneath whose roof she had never known the affections of a father, much less had she ever received any kind attention from him. But now the scene was changed. She was intended for the bride elect of a wealthy Lord; and on

her arrival at Oldstock Hall, she was not treated as formerly, the neglected offspring of a woman, who, however lovely or exemplary, was thought no more of after she had been numbered with the dead, but as a beautiful appendage to the family mansion, from whose opening prospects their own consequence and ambitious hopes were to be raised.

The first step they made towards the accomplishment of their wishes, was to place Flora in the most conspicuous light to Lord Primrose, whenever he should again pay a visit to Oldstock Hall: but to set off the person of so exquisitely lovely a creature, required but little care; and certainly it was with no small degree of satisfaction that Sir Oliver surveyed the fine face and figure of his lovely daughter, when he beheld her seated beside the person of her antiquated maiden aunt, in the drawing-room of Oldstock Hall, the day they had brought her from Mrs. Evelyn's.

"Why, Flora, you are positively grown quite a woman!" exclaimed Sir Oliver.

To which she archly replied—

"Yes, papa, every body tells me that I look very much like one."

Sir Oliver could not resist from laughter at this observation; but Miss Oldstock drew herself up very starchly, and in her usual precise manner exclaimed—

"Notwithstanding which, I dare say, Miss Flora, that you are a mere child in your actions, and that I shall find much difficulty in managing you."

"Oh no, aunt, you will have no difficulty at all," said the sweet girl; "for I can manage myself. Dear

Mrs. Evelyn has entirely taken that trouble off your hands."

"Manage yourself, child!" uttered Miss Oldstock, expressing some surprise and displeasure; for Sir Oliver was still laughing at the good humoured pleasantry of his beautiful daughter. "How so, pray?"

"I will tell you, aunt," cried the lively Flora, "how Mrs. Evelyn taught me to manage myself so cleverly. Whenever I pouted and frowned, or looked angry, indeed when I put myself in a very great passion, she used to set a looking glass right before me, and bid me look in it; and I was so disgusted with myself, you cannot conceive; for I never imagined that I could appear half so ugly. From that time I never attempted to put myself out of humour; for whenever I found the pet coming on, I flew to the glass, and set it before me, till every frown had disappeared, and I had learnt to be a good girl again. Now that I am a woman, do you think that I would frown and look ugly? Not I, indeed."

In this manner the bewitching lovely Flora stole into the good graces of both her father and her aunt. It was then no wonder that her enchanting loveliness and good nature very shortly made an impression on the heart of Lord Primrose, who, under some pretext or other, was always riding over from Stanmore to see his good friend Sir Oliver, at Oldstock Hall. Sometimes these visits were unusually protracted, and presents made to the pretty Flora, which she accepted with the most modest grace and unaffected sweetness.

But the smothered flame did not break out till, on one of these visits, his Lordship was attacked with a fit

of the gout, and confined for many weeks to his chamber at Oldstock Hall; during which he more, than once expressed a wish to see Flora: but when Sir Oliver intimated his Lordship's wish to his daughter, she seemed surprised.

"Lord, papa, but what can he want *me* for, when he has so many people about him who can amuse him so much better?"

"Perhaps not," cried Sir Oliver, smiling; and Flora blushed a little, though she could not tell why.

"Well, I will certainly go, since his Lordship so earnestly desires it," replied Flora; "but if he should be cross, and snap my nose off, the same as he does to Mrs. Mildew, the housekeeper, what should I do then, papa? I have a great notion that I should laugh, and then he would be angry, and I should run away from him as fast as possible."

"Try the experiment," uttered Sir Oliver, and Flora arose from her chair.

"Aye go, my love, and try what effect you will have in enlivening his Lordship's spirits," cried Miss Oldstock, exchanging glances with her brother.

"But he has often told me that I was a wild and a giddy girl," said Flora, rapidly retreating towards the door; "and yet he never looked as if he were tired of hearing me talk. Well, I will go this very moment up to his Lordship's chamber, and let you know how I have succeeded when I come back again."

"Flora, take these nice ripe peaches with you," cried Miss Oldstock, giving her pretty niece a small basket of delicious fruit from the side-board; "perhaps his Lordship may take a fancy to one; and if he does,

mind, Flora, that you select one of the finest, and give it to his Lordship from your own pretty little white hand."

"Lord, aunt, what should I give it to him with else!" answered Flora, smiling, and departed.

No sooner had her light foot ascended the staircase which led to his Lordship's apartment, than Miss Oldstock, who had fixed her eyes steadily on the candle, broke out into the following exclamation;—

"My gracious heavens! look, brother."

"Look at what, Liddy?" enquired Sir Oliver.

"I protest there is a coronet, as plain as a pike-staff, in the candle," uttered she; "I thought as much: yes, I began to suspect that his Lordship could contain himself no longer, and that, when this fit of the gout was over, that——but you are laughing, brother; how prodigiously ill bred, to titter in one's face in this manner, just as I was pointing out to you the probability of——what! laughing again, brother?"

"Why, who in the name of all the gods and goddesses can prevent it, Liddy?" at length rejoined Sir Oliver. "There is first your coronet in the candle, and the pike-staff, which certainly bear but little resemblance to each other; and then there is your immediate supposition of his Lordship's declaring his passion for Flora, just as the fit of the gout is subsiding. I protest the idea is truly whimsical."

"Whimsical or not, you will find, when Flora returns, that I am perfectly correct with my coronet in the candle, after all, brother," cried Miss Oldstock, who always plumed herself upon having a foreknowledge of things in general; "and what can be more

natural, than for a man to declare his passion for the woman that he loves, when they are comfortably enjoying a *tete-a-tete* together?"

"Oh, I must acknowledge that to be an extremely natural conclusion," replied Sir Oliver; "still I do not think that Lord Primrose will chuse this oppportunity of unburthening his mind to Flora."

"And why not, pray?" impatiently demanded Miss Oldstock.

"Propriety," answered Sir Oliver, "and delicacy. I should consider no man prudent or delicate, in soliciting the affections of my daughter, before he had previously consulted my sentiments on so important and serious a subject."

"The importance of a fiddle de dee!" answered Miss Oldstock; "as if you had not considered the importance of that subject long ago, and that you will not be heartily rejoiced at Lord Primrose taking your daughter off your hands; in which case you know, brother, you will be able to provide handsomely for me."

"Dot and carry one, Liddy," cried Sir Oliver, laughing; "and the sum total is *interest* in the grand adjustment you have made for Flora's marriage with Lord Primrose."

"Why to be sure I have thought of myself in this affair," admitted Miss Oldstock; "I am a poor lone woman, you know, and when you are gone shall have nobody to console me. These are melancholy thoughts, brother."

Miss Oldstock drew out her pocket-handkerchief, which was most dexterously applied to her eyes, to insinuate that they were already wet with her tears.

"Well, well, Liddy, I dare say you will be sorry for my death."

"I sha'nt survive you long," whimpered out Miss Oldstock, trying to make her tone as piteous and as affecting as circumstances would admit of; "not very long; there's not many years between us."

"No, Liddy, and those are on *your* side," cried Sir Oliver; "and that is some consolation to so affectionate a sister. Now, had my brother Hector lived, you know there would have been little chance for you; for being considerably the junior of both of us, he would, on my demise, have jumpt very quietly into the possession of the whole of the estate, and Oldstock Hall into the bargain."

"My brother Hector!" screamed out Miss Oldstock: "Oh, the vile profligate! the spendthrift! the prodigal! The—the—I know not how to call him by a name too odious. He jump into the whole estate! No, thank Heaven, he has jumpt where he is, and that I shall never set eyes upon him more."

A pause of some minutes ensued to this pious ejaculation, in which it was probable that some affecting recollections of his *supposed* deceased brother arose to the memory of Sir Oliver; and that he was a brother whose actions, whose principles, whose professions had never disgraced him, he could not but tacitly acknowledge; and to departed merit even envy denies not a tear; but it was not a tear that glistened in the eyes of Sir Oliver. No, it had not so pleasing a tendency over his feelings. But it was something worse; it was compunction—a tickling thorn that pierced his conscience, far more painful than the tear which is produced from

the effect of sensibility. That he had uniformly neglected that brave and unfortunate brother, occasioned him to feel, even at the present moment, a pang of involuntary remorse—the bitterest, the most heart-galling of all human sensations; for it irresistibly forced him to exclaim—

"Poor Hector! with all his faults, he was generous, warm-hearted, and truly honest. I do not think that Hector was ever guilty of a mean or dirty action in the whole course of his existence. I have often thought that my Flora is the very image of him: she has Hector's eyes, and Hector's nose; and was it not for that dimple just at the corner of her mouth, which so strongly resembles her mother's, she would also have the very mouth of her uncle Hector, as I remember him in the flower of his youth, before he went into the army. Yes, Flora is certainly very like poor Hector; and no bad compliment either, for he was one of the finest young fellows, before he went abroad, that ever I beheld in my born days."

"And it is well that your daughter, Sir Oliver, whom you say is so like that profligate, (though, for my own part, I cannot see the strong resemblance you speak of,) has none of his wicked propensities, and abominable rakish ways," cried Miss Oldstock, sneeringly, highly displeased that Sir Oliver had chosen her brother Hector as a subject for present discussion; as in the first place, her young brother had always been the object of her total neglect, indifference, and even dislike, because he had used no ceremony towards her in reproaching her for her conduct on certain occasions, when his happiness was materially concerned; and in

the next place, the name of Hector was a *memorandum* she did not wish to be put in mind of, being conscious that she had once done him an injury in the tenderest point with the object of his affections. Although he had freely pardoned her for that in his life-time, yet it was a reflection which she could not shake off, after she imagined him to be no more; and therefore wished to be reminded of him as little as possible. The sight of Flora, who had just popt her lovely head in at the door, was certainly a most seasonable relief, at this moment, to the feelings of Miss Oldstock.

The lovely girl having seated herself in a chair, exactly opposite to Sir Oliver, he, after viewing her embarrassed countenance with some surprise, exclaimed—

"Why, Flora, what is the matter, child? This is the first time I have seen you look serious since you quitted Mrs. Evelyn's."

To which Flora, casting down her beautiful eyes, while a roseate blush mantled on her fair cheeks, replied—

"Why because I *am* serious, papa, and that is the truth of it."

"And what has so suddenly made you so?" enquired Sir Oliver.

"Lord Primrose," answered Flora, "has been talking in a very strange way to me, and I don't understand it; perhaps you may, papa, when I tell you what he said. You must know, in the first place, I knocked softly at the door of his Lordship's chamber, and he bid me come in. 'I hope I don't disturb you, my Lord,' cried I; 'and am glad to find your Lordship so

much better.' 'So,' says he, 'and are you really interested in my recovery, my sweet Miss Flora?' 'To be sure I am,' answered I; 'do you think, my Lord, that it can give me any pleasure to see any body suffering pain? No, indeed, I am not so hard-hearted.' And then I handed him a peach, as you told me to do, aunt."

"You was prodigiously right, child. Well, what followed? I knew that the peach would win his heart. All my contrivance! Well, dear?"—

"I wish, Liddy, you would contrive to let me hear what Flora is going to say," cried Sir Oliver, pettishly. "Well, my love, you gave his Lordship one of the peaches."

"Yes, papa; and then—but what signifies mincing the matter, when the secret must come out, after all. So, papa, Lord Primrose downright said, 'Flora, I love you;' and, 'Flora, will you marry me?' Which so exceedingly surprised and astonished me, that I burst out a laughing in his Lordship's face: for how ridiculous you know, papa, it is for such an old man as Lord Primrose to think of marrying me. Don't you think so, aunt?"

"No, Miss Flora, I don't think any such thing, I assure you," cried Miss Oldstock, exceedingly provoked at the rudeness of Flora to Lord Primrose; "I am much more surprised that your preceptress, Mrs. Evelyn, has not, with all her fine sentiments and learning, taught you better manners to your superiors; and I am quite ashamed of you, Flora, prodigiously ashamed of you."

"Indeed, you acted very improperly, I must needs

say, Flora," said Sir Oliver; "and I have no doubt but his Lordship is completely disgusted with your conduct."

"And will probably leave Oldstock Hall for ever," cried Miss Oldstock. "Yes, Miss Flora, you have done a very pretty piece of business for yourself; lost one of the finest matches in the kingdom—a peer of the realm, with more than half a million of money; a title too into the bargain: all thrown away upon an idle, silly, vain, and gigling chit like you. And now, pray, Miss, what have you to say for yourself? Don't sit laughing there, you little provoking toad, don't; but tell your father instantly what you have got to say for acting so basely."

Flora, who, in spite of the angry and displeased looks of both her father and aunt, had been unable to refrain from the most involuntary fits of laughter, now attempted for a moment to recover her gravity, and at length repeated-

"I have got a great deal more to say, if you will let me. But how can papa hear me, when you keep such a dinning in his ears, aunt, just for all the world like a mill that goes *click clack*, and never stands still, but when it is forced to do so? Why, bless me, I have not offended Lord Primrose; for when I laughed so prodigiously, he laughed too, and we both laughed together for a long time. He said I amused him, and that he loved to see me merry, for that it was a proof of my being of a happy and contented disposition. So he said he wanted to speak to papa about marrying me; and asked me if I would like to be called Lady Primrose, and have a fine coach and horses, and footmen to wait

upon me, and live at Stanmore Priory all the days of my life. So I said *yes*:—and he was so delighted. So pray, aunt, what would you have me say? If I like to laugh, what is that to you, pray, if it don't offend the man who is going to marry me?"

This elucidation of matters very soon reconciled Miss Oldstock to the utmost possible harmony with her lovely niece. Sir Oliver, perfectly astonished at the so ready compliance of Flora with the proposals of her ancient admirer, bestowed on her the most endearing epithets of applause and approbation; and Lord Primrose, having fully declared his intentions in the course of a few days to Sir Oliver, was most joyfully accepted, and became the enamoured husband of the youthful and beauteous Flora, when a decent time had elapsed for paying his court to so lovely a creature, who certainly, if she did not love her lord very passionately, very truly appreciated the distinguished compliment he had paid her, and the exalted situation in which he had placed her.

Nor was the person of Lord Primrose, though so considerably advanced in years, unpleasing to behold; for in his youth he had been an extremely handsome man, while his manners were those of the highly finished gentleman. His habits were indeed retired, and his principles somewhat arbitrary and singular; but as these were never exerted over his young and lovely wife, it was no wonder that she did not regard him with any symptoms of disgust, but on the contrary studied to conform to his will and pleasure on every occasion. In the early days of their marriage, he informed her, that every reasonable request of hers

should be implicitly complied with, and that he would only restrain her in one particular point.

"And what is that, my dear Lord?" enquired the smiling Flora.

To which he replied—

"I must chuse your acquaintances, my love; for a married woman ought not to have persons styling themselves *her friends*, unless they are also the friends of her husband."

"And do you think I should regard any one, who did not respect you, my Lord?" uttered Flora, blushing deeply; or that I would ever sanction their visits at Stan more Priory, if *you* did not? Can you think me so ungrateful; or that I would not cheerfully forego the dearest acquaintance I had in the world to please you?"

Lord Primrose had been for many minutes intently examining every lineament of her lovely countenance, while she had so ingenuously and sweetly uttered this confession; and sealing her lips with a kiss of undisguised rapture, never more resumed a subject which he saw was quite unnecessary. Flora was ever afterwards permitted to invite whom she chose at the Priory, without her lord ever attempting to interfere on the occasion.

The family of Mr. Evelyn, the Rector of Stanmore, were honoured with the most distinguished marks of his Lordship's favour and kindness; for he looked upon Mrs. Evelyn as almost the mother of his lovely Flora; but for whom her education had been shamefully neglected, and but for whose excellent precepts she had imbibed very different principles. On his marriage with Flora, therefore, he presented Mr. Evelyn with

the sum of five thousand pounds, and with it he addressed to him the following words:—

"Evelyn, you are a man of principle and merit, both of which I respect; as a proof of which accept of the enclosed trifle. You have a son unprovided for; it may enable you to do something for him; and when you require further aid, ask of me, and it shall never be denied. My Flora has spoken highly of your wife and daughter, both of whom I have frequently seen with her at church. Evelyn, they are the only inmates that I will consent to admit beneath the roof of Stanmore Priory. My Flora has a pure and uncorrupted heart, and is as innocent as the bleating lamb; but she is young, Evelyn, and her spirits are lively and elastic as the bounding doe; nor will I check them, while they are guileless and free. But you understand me, Evelyn: were I to admit the bold, familiar, and licentious within my gates—were I once to give them a range within my house—it were to expose my young and lovely treasure to the mysteries of that cursed system of *fashionable vice*, which I so dread, that I would sooner plunge Flora into the burning flames of Etna, than have her pure and spotless mind contaminated by its baneful influence. If I have married a young and lovely woman, I wish to keep her to myself; do you mark that, Evelyn. I am not going to put on a fool's cap in my old days, who never condescended to wear one in my young ones."

"Your Lordship is incontestibly right," answered the worthy Rector; "and although there is no danger of the principles of Lady Primrose being ever perverted from their natural bias, yet I commend you

for the caution you have adopted. Your lovely wife, over whose dawning of childhood I have watched with unceasing care and assiduity, has, amidst the native loveliness and simplicity of her character, but one fault, and even that leans to virtue's, to humanity's side; but even that is a fault, when indulged to an immoderate excess.

Lord Primrose was all ears, all eyes; and he listened to the worthy Rector with the most curious and profound attention; but not without having previously exclaimed—

"And has my Flora a fault? Zounds! Evelyn, I think you must be mistaken; for I have been trying to find one out for these last twelve months that I have been married to her, and have given up the task as fruitless; so, in the words of the old poet, let me say—

> 'She has no faults, or *I* no faults can spy;
> She's *all* perfection, or *all blindness* I.'

Now, Evelyn, let us hear the faults of my Flora."

"And never did you hear one who is so partial to them, my Lord," cried Mr. Evelyn; "and while I have chid the lovely creature for indulging them, Mrs. Evelyn and my daughter know that I have kissed off the tear that bedewed the blooming cheek, that flowed in consequence of the seeming severity which I had adopted. But why did I do it, my Lord? It was only to repress that generous warmth of native benevolence of disposition, which was so easy to be imposed upon, and to prevent her from exercising deeds of charity to those objects who were unworthy of her gifts. It was in fact, my Lord, to teach my lovely and too generous

pupil the art of *discrimination*, that I undertook to become her censor; for I have known her to give the last farthing she possessed in the world to any who conveyed to her ear the pitying tale of distress—a disposition which your Lordship is sensibly aware will lead her youthful and inexperienced heart frequently to become the dupe of her own credulity, and which is certainly neither that of Sir Oliver, her father, or his sister, Miss Lydia."

"No, by the Lord Harry, it is not," cried Lord Primrose, laughing; "for what either of these pious good souls give away would not, I think, contribute to the treasures of a *church mouse*, be it e'er so *starved*. But you are right, Evelyn; and I admit that this is indeed a fault in my Flora, which time only can correct. My doors are surrounded by beggars from morning till night, whom she is constantly relieving; but what can I do? The sweet creature is so gratified by it, that I should be more than savage to let her see that I am displeased with her munificence. And I say, Evelyn, I had better give way to this her favourite propensity, than see her a slave to any other. I had better have beggars at my doors, though it were ten times a day, soliciting charity, than open them to a parcel of idle coxcombs, who would gaze on my lovely wife with the profane eyes of licentiousness, and sue for far greater favours; and of two evils it is always wise to chuse the least. What say you, Evelyn?"

"Assuredly, your Lordship," answered the Rector. "Over the Hesperian fruit we must never forget to place a guard; and the best guard is he who has the entire possession of it."

At this moment the entrance of Lady Primrose put an end to this interesting conversation between the Rector and his patron; for towards Mr. Evelyn his Lordship continued to preserve that character to the end of his existence. Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn were at Stanmore Priory within only a few days of his Lordship's approaching dissolution, of whom he took the most affecting farewell; and on the opening of the will, the following words were expressed:—

"I bequeath to my dear and highly esteemed friend, the present Rector of Stanmore, William Evelyn, the sum of a thousand pounds, to be paid in sterling money, as a testimony of the great mark of respect and good will that I bear him; also to Charlotte, wife of the said William Evelyn, I bequeath the sum of one thousand pounds, in sterling money, in commemoration of my respect for that most excellent and worthy woman; also to Fanny, the daughter of the said William and Charlotte Evelyn, I bequeath the sum of two thousand five hundred pounds, for the kind services she rendered to me during the severe stages of my heavy and afflictive illness; and I moreover do desire that these sums here bequeathed may be paid into the hands of the said William, Charlotte, and Fanny Evelyn, immediately after my demise."

As all these gifts were unknown to Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn, or their amiable daughter, who was two years older than Lady Primrose, and to whom she was passionately attached even from the days of their earliest infancy, what was the surprise and transport of the young and lovely widow to find that her dear lord had so affectionately remembered the friends of her early

youth! Bursting into tears, when this part of his Lordship's will was read, she exclaimed—

"Oh, my dear and worthy Lord! how gratefully does thy Flora value this mark of thy affection towards her! Dear Mr. Evelyn, dear Mrs. Evelyn, beloved Fanny! Accept the most joyous congratulations of a truly happy and thankful wife. Ah! would it were ten times as much! How gladly would I bestow it on my dear, dear, worthy friends."

"No doubt but Lady Primrose would like no better than the whole of her husband's immense property were to be distributed in gifts of charity," cried Miss Oldstock, who was present, with Sir Oliver, at the opening of his Lordship's will; and who, not finding a single bequest left to either her brother or herself, vented forth her spleen and indignation by making the most invidious remarks on the family of Mr. Evelyn, to all who happened to be sitting near her, and which occasionally burst out in the following observations:—

"Yes, Lady Primrose seems prodigiously pleased with this mark of her husband's bounty to that set of toad-eaters, the Evelyn's; but she ought to be ashamed of expressing it in the manner that she has in the presence of so many respectable personages to witness it, and when her own father and aunt are sitting so near her. Till now I always thought Lord Primrose a more sensible and discerning man than to bestow benefices so largely where he has already given so much, on purpose to please a pretty wife. It was not long ago that he gave Walter Evelyn a sum of money to go abroad with, and to put a red coat upon his back; and now Miss Fanny, forsooth, must have a little fortune left

her from the same lap of Fortunatus. The old folks too have feathered their nests tolerably well."

How long Miss Oldstock would have continued to spit forth her venom, was uncertain; but the will being read, and finally adjusted, the party broke up, and adjourned at a late hour to their respective habitations.

CHAPTER V.

"If to her share some female errors fall,
Look in her face, and you'll forget them all."

IT was no wonder, that after these arrangements had taken place in the will of the late Lord Primrose, so greatly in favour of the family of the Evelyns, that both Sir Oliver and Miss Oldstock felt themselves highly piqued with the lovely widow, and withdrew from their accustomed visits to Stanmore Priory for a considerable length of time after his Lordship's demise. Notwithstanding the repeated and kind invitations she was continually giving to them, yet none of these were accepted by either father or aunt, till within a few weeks prior to the serious and dangerous indisposition of Sir Oliver; and it was then thought necessary to apprize his daughter of the alarming state of his health, who, on the very moment that the news reached her, set out for Oldstock Hall, which she never quitted till her father terminated his mortal existence, evincing to him, by every mark of the tenderest attention, the filial duty of an affectionate child, which it was said had greatly contributed to soften and to soothe the depart-

ing moments of Sir Oliver, who then regretted too late that he had not more sedulously sought the enlivening society of his amiable and exemplary daughter, or was induced to listen to any unfavourable impressions given of the worthy family of the Evelyns by his envious and invidious sister, who had so long withheld him from renewing his visits at Stanmore Priory, for the mere gratification of tormenting and wounding the feelings of her lovely niece, who she was well aware could not bear to be at variance with her father.

But the melancholy scene which now prevailed at Oldstock Hall induced Miss Oldstock to be reconciled almost on any terms with Lady Primrose, whom, after the death of her brother, she visited as formerly, that is, when she heard that none of the Evelyns were there, (for no inducement even of the lovely Flora could prevail with her to conquer her ill-founded prejudice and antipathy towards this unoffending and amiable family;) and whenever any quarrel now arose on the part of her Ladyship, it was only when Miss Oldstock thought proper to inveigh bitterly on her friends, and to cast out the most ungenerous reflections against the family of Mr. Evelyn. This was a system of conduct which she had of late discontinued in the hearing of her niece, as she found it was not politic to disoblige so wealthy a relation, to whose generosity of disposition she had already owed many considerable advantages; and this was one reason why she had been so silent respecting the name of the Evelyns on the arrival of her brother Hector at Oldstock Hall, because she was convinced that no malicious and invidious report of the Evelyns would have any influence over him, or gain the

slightest credibility or belief; for he had always liked the Evelyns, even before he went abroad, and it was very unlikely that he should imbibe any prejudices towards them now that they were the chosen friends and companions of Lady Primrose. There Miss Oldstock certainly judged rightly; for the very first question that the General put to the lovely widow, as they sat at breakfast on the ensuing morning after his arrival at Stanmore Priory, was about the family of Mr. Evelyn. To which she smilingly replied—

"Yes, I knew, uncle, that you would remember Mr. Evelyn."

"Remember him! certainly I do, my dear," cried the General; "he was just one of those sort of men that every body likes, because they cannot reasonably pretend to find fault with him, and whom nobody can dislike without being guilty of something in the shape of envy or ill nature, which are two abominable things; I also remember Mrs. Evelyn, your preceptress; she was an exceedingly elegant and pretty woman, though your aunt Liddy never would allow of it; but you know your aunt Liddy, my dear Flora; she has an insuperable objection to every thing that is young and pretty. Then Mrs. Evelyn's children—they were particularly engaging. There was a fine youth called Walter, and a nice little blooming girl called Fanny; and I believe at this period these composed the whole of Mr. Evelyn's family, did not they, Flora?"

"Yes, uncle, and they compose the whole of it now," cried the widow; "Walter and Fanny are the only children of Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn. Walter is an Ensign in the army; he was a favourite of my late husband,

but not more than his lovely sister, to both of whom my dear lord has left the most incontestable proofs of his regard, while to dear Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn he has been a sincere friend."

"Has he so?" cried the General; "why then I shall respect his memory for it as long as I can draw breath. So, after all, Lord Primrose was a liberal-minded man, notwithstanding that he made a will so contradictory and unreasonable, but with which, as you are satisfied, I do not see what right any one else has to complain of; therefore we will say nothing more about the will, my dear Flora."

"Not if you love me, uncle," cried the lovely widow, with an arch and bewitching smile, which was peculiar to the turn of countenance with which nature had so eminently gifted her, and which in any other female but Flora, would have been mistaken for a vivacity nearly bordering on levity.

And what turn of countenance was that? methinks I hear some of my fair readers very naturally enquire; for you have given us no description of the person of your widow yet, and we wish to know whether her eyes were blue or black, her complexion fair or dark, and whether she was tall or short, or of a middling size; in short, we want to know what the widow was like.

Well, have patience, and I will set her portrait immediately before you. In the first place, we will begin with her eyes, which were more of the hazel than approaching to a jet black; and the same might be said of her hair, which was of a dark chesnut, with which she took such little pains, that it never appeared in the

direct costume of fashion, and yet it always looked gracefully adorned, certainly without the least aid from ornament, for she never wore any but once, and that was on her wedding day, in compliment to her husband, who had presented her with a set of diamonds on the happy occasion; but even then her lovely tresses partially concealed them, and Flora fancied she would have looked far better without them.

Now, then for her complexion, which all the lilies and roses in the world could not have lent a charm to, or robbed of its natural hue; for she was not only beautifully fair, but she added to it a look of fresh health, which had never been impaired by late hours, nor ever corroded by sorrow; and the laughing dimple, at the corner of a pretty rosy-coloured mouth, which the General so perfectly remembered, and had so often spoken of to Ensign Conway as one of the principal charms in the face of his lovely niece, when only a child, had lost none of its smiling beauty since she had grown into womanhood, and had become a widow; for it was there still, with ten thousand more additional graces to keep it in play—such as white, clear, even teeth, and red lips, which might have passed for twin roses, had not the upper one more poutingly expressed the innate sweetness and sensibility that reigned within them. But the expression of the whole countenance was certainly the very soul of archness, which had too much playful simplicity blended with it to be taken for cunning or coquetry; and the quick, lively, and intelligent blush which so frequently animated her fair cheek, was the offspring of native modesty rather than the posthumous one of levity, at the slightest approach

of which Flora would have turned a disgustful ear. Vivacity will always be found to be the companion of innocence; it dwells with it, and never deserts the company of its lovely associate, till sorrow changes its beautiful hue, or guilt invades its peaceful repose. Alas! vivacity can never be the accompaniment of a tortured mind, nor can it long inhabit the mansion where guilt presides; but sweet smiling innocence, having no fear, is ever joyous and jocund as the blooming spring, new welcomed up with bleat of lamb, or note of woodlark wild. It is free, unshackled, and therefore it is happy. Such were the spirits of our lovely widow, whose portrait I have now accurately endeavoured to portray.

Well, but her figure—oh! I had forgotten that most necessary piece of intelligence to my enquiring readers. She was certainly neither very tall nor very delicately made; that is, not quite so much as to resemble a thread-paper or a weazle in her shape, nor was she so remarkably robust as to be styled vulgarly plump. But Flora was of the middle stature, and just of a sufficient fullness to express the loveliness of feminine beauty and grace; her hands were little, and her feet were small; her bosom, which was transparently white, was exactly where it ought to be, although very little of it was ever displayed in the costume of her attire, which was always simple and uniformly neat. Not that Flora affected to have any particular dislike to dress, but she could not bear the trouble of it, much less to make it a matter of principal study or delight. Lord Primrose indeed wished to have seen her arrayed in far more costly apparel than that in which she usu-

ally appeared; but if she wore them one day to please her lord, she was sure to leave them off the next in order to please herself. When his Lordship perceived this natural indifference of dress or ornament in his lovely Flora, he never pressed her to wear any; for to him her principal charm was the unvaried sweetness of her disposition, and her smile of fascinating good temper and enlivening rays of vivacity, which, so far from displeasing him, contributed to cheer the wintry season of his days with eternal sunshine, making his earthly home a paradise of sweets, in which no canker worm had ever crept to despoil of a single charm.

Lord Primrose died in the full possession of a young and lovely woman, whom he never once repented of having raised to the exalted station in which he had left her, and would have married had he even been in the flower of his youth; but what his Lordship's intentions were when he made his will, with a certain clause which made it a doubtful point whether he thought ill or well of his lovely wife, could not possibly be rightly ascertained. It might be imagined that the motives which had induced him to make so singular a clause, were for the future benefit of this young, innocent, and amiable creature, and to prevent her from becoming the dupe of the too frequently licentious and profligate fortune-hunter. He had, therefore, appointed a guardian over her, with whose firm unshaken principles and integrity it was probable that he had long been acquainted, and with whom he had been on familiar terms of intimacy; and though he had not seen the Earl of Arundel since his marriage with the daughter of Sir Oliver, yet he had ostensible reasons for considering him,

in preference to all other men, a proper guardian for his young and lovely wife; and that Lord Primrose had constantly been in the habit of corresponding with the Earl, since his retirement on the continent, the cause of his being a voluntary exile from his native land having long been confidently reposed in the bosom of his friend, from which it had never escaped, not even in his last expiring moments.

The secret of Lord Arundel's private history and domestic griefs, (of which he had sustained no small share in this vale of chequered life,) had died with Lord Primrose, and was not likely to be revealed after his demise; but rumour had supplied many reports of the exile's character, and conveyed many impressions to the mind of his young and lovely ward, (for such the widow was to Lord Arundel,) that made her apprehensive that she should find in him a rigid monitor and arbitrary tyrant, and for this reason she had conceived the most unwarrantable prejudice towards him, without knowing exactly why she ought to entertain such sentiments against a man whom she had never seen, and who, being so high in the confidence of her husband, she ought to have thought better of.

If ever Flora looked serious, and lost her wonted sprightliness for a moment, it was only when the thoughts of Lord Arundel floated across her imagination; but the next she would laugh, and recovering her charming vivacity, would exclaim, if any of her friends, the Evelyn family, were with her—

"How ridiculous I am to be so terribly afraid of this man, whom I never yet saw, and seeing, perhaps may not dislike after all."

"For which I am really inclined to be half angry with you, my dear Flora," cried Mrs. Evelyn, to whom Lady Primrose had just addressed this conversation; "it is mere prejudice, in which you should not permit yourself to indulge at the expence of any one human being; and prejudice, my love, will in time become habit, and habit is sometimes incurable. Dismiss, therefore, from your mind all apprehensions of an unfavourable nature respecting this Lord Arundel, whom, as you justly observe, you have never seen; and if you think ill of him, you only ground your prejudices from the reports of an always ill-judging world. Alas! my love, had you more frequently mixed with it, you would have found that its colours are generally false, however painted fairly, and that the true colouring is never seen through its impervious folds. You have been spared from that, my sweetest Flora, by the wise and never erring dispensations of an Almighty Providence. The roses of life have been scattered only in your path. You cannot be too thankful for having hitherto escaped from being encumbered by its innumerable and bitter thorns."

The bright sunshine of vivacity for a moment forsook the cheek of the sprightly Flora; and as she turned her lovely eyes with enthusiastic affection on the beloved preceptress of her early days, it was not certain whether those eyes were not humid with a tear, as, throwing her arms around the neck of Mrs. Evelyn, she softly exclaimed—

"Look what enchantment you possess over the feelings of your thoughtless giddy Flora. I can be grave when you talk to me, while I only laugh at the lectures

of every body else; yet indeed, indeed, dear Mrs. Evelyn, I am not insensible to the happy lot in which Providence has placed me, nor ungrateful for the blessings I enjoy so much above my fellow creatures, and far, infinitely far, beyond my merits. I have been the most fortunate girl in existence, I know I have; and if I had not a young husband, like most other young women, I had one, who, although old, always endeavoured to make me happy. I am happy beyond description; and I delight in seeing every body happy about me. I have not a thought to vex me or put me out of humour, save only when I think of this Lord Arundel."

"Lord Arundel again, my dearest Flora," cried Mrs. Evelyn, smiling; "I see how little value you set upon my lectures, (if such you call them,) when you cannot suffer the name of this poor man to dwell in quiet on your recollection. Now do oblige me, Flora, by forgetting that there is such a person as Lord Arundel in existence."

The lovely widow now laughed immoderately at having again caught herself in the repetition of such a fault.

"Well, and I heartily wish that this terrible man had never been born," uttered she; "but as for forgetting him, while I hear that he is living, I protest, dear Madam, that I cannot, because you know that if ever I——"

The widow stopt, tried to laugh again, but the effort failed, and she only blushed prodigiously, when Mrs. Evelyn exclaimed—

"If ever you do *what*, Flora?"

The lovely widow, while she betrayed an embarrass-

ment and a confusion more perceptible than ever, replied—

"Why, if ever I marry again, you know, my dear Mrs. Evelyn; which I am sure I have not the slightest thought of at the present moment."

"Why then did such a thought enter your head at the present moment, my love?" archly enquired Mrs. Evelyn.

A brighter blush mounted to the cheek of Flora; but she laughed it off, while she cried—

"Lord, I don't know; I cannot tell for the life of me. Thoughts will come and go without being asked; they are bold intruders, and one cannot banish them hence, let one try ever so much. I don't think of marrying, I am sure; only I meant to say, that if I ever *did* marry again, my *second choice* must depend wholly on the consent of this Lord Arudel; or——"

Flora dropt again.

"You will certainly be deprived of some thousands of your late husband's property," cried Mrs. Evelyn.

"Ah! I should not mind *that*, if the object were worthy of the sacrifice," uttered the lovely widow, with a gentle, though involuntary sigh, which would not have been suffered to have escaped from its snowy confines, could she by any effort have kept it a captive there; "and yet, strange as it may seem, I should never like to bestow my hand where my guardian would not as freely bestow his sanction. It would be so pleasing to merit the approval of a man whom I never saw, Mrs. Evelyn."

"And yet are so fearful of beholding, my dearest Flora," cried Mrs. Evelyn; "you are positively this

morning quite enigmatical, Flora; and as I don't deal in conundrums or riddles, it would be a useless task were I to attempt to expound them."

"But perhaps Fanny could, if she was here," cried the blushing Flora, twisting a beautiful rose, which she had taken from one of the vases, into a thousand fantastical shapes, which so highly amused Mrs. Evelyn, that she smilingly exclaimed, as she arose to take her departure—

"Well, my love, I have positively chattered with you till I have quite forgotten there is such a thing as time in the order of the day. I actually promised Mr. Evelyn to return to dinner. Besides, he is writing to his son; and my poor Walter would think his mother strangely neglectful were I not to add a postscript in answer to his last kind letter."

At the name of Walter, the ever pure and eloquent blood receded from the cheeks of the fair widow, and as suddenly returned to them again in an animated rosy blush, while she exclaimed—

"And is not Fanny employed too in the same pleasing task, my dear Madam?"

"Yes, I believe Fanny is also writing to her brother by the same opportunity," answered Mrs. Evelyn, with an air of the most apparent indifference.

"Then pray tell her not to forget to add a postscript for me," cried Flora; "she received my instructions for so doing last night; and if I do not find that they are strictly attended to, I shall be sadly disappointed; remember that."

Mrs. Evelyn looked surprised, and in a graver tone than usual, demanded to know what those instructions

were, of which she had been kept in profound ignorance.

"Nay, dear Madam, ask me any thing but that," cried the blushing Flora, taking the hand of Mrs. Evelyn, and tenderly pressing it to her lips; "I have never yet done any thing to displease you; but you must not enquire into *cabinet secrets*. Fanny is my prime minister of state, and she is at present employed on some important business for Lady Primrose, in which neither Mr. nor Mrs. Evelyn are requested to interfere; although they may one day be entrusted with the whole of the secret negociation."

"Ah! my love, I am now at no loss to guess at your generous motives for concealment. You have doubtless been conferring a gift on poor Walter, and would willingly conceal the noble benefaction, to avoid the gratitude of his fond parents; but you cannot do this, my amiable Flora. I am too well acquainted with the generosity of your disposition. Yet, dearest creature, why are you continually adding to the thousand obligations I am already under to you, and, through your means, to your late respected husband, whose memory I shall ever revere."

"Had you not better hasten to Mr. Evelyn, my dear Madam, and finish your postscript," cried Flora, laughing; "for positively if you stay here much longer, I shall run away from you; and look, I protest I had forgotten as well as you that time flies on roseate wings when passed in the society of those we love. There is is the card which I received this morning from my fashionable neighbour, the Countess of Stormond, inviting me to a select party at a ball and supper, which she

gives to-morrow evening at the lodge, in consequence of her eldest daughter, Lady Sophia, coming of age."

"And do you intend going, my dear Flora?" enquired Mrs. Evelyn, with some anxiety depicted in her countenance.

To which the widow replied—

"Why that is exactly what I want to know, and wish to ask Mr. Evelyn about. I wish to know something more of this fashionable family, from whom indeed I have received many invitations since they have come to reside wholly at the lodge; but I have always declined accepting of any, because nobody could tell me any thing at all about them. You know my Lord Primrose was very particular who I formed any acquaintance with; and although my dear lord is no longer here to impose any restraint on my inclinations, yet I would restrain myself from doing any act of impropriety, my dear Mrs. Evelyn, the same as if he had been living. He objected not to pleasures, when they were harmless and innocent; and indulged me in every wish of my heart, because he well knew that heart would never encroach on the boundaries he prescribed. My husband is no longer here, but his precepts are constantly before me; nor will I act contrary to discretion. At the same time I do not wish to appear singularly strange, or formally precise, you know, Mrs. Evelyn; and if this family of the Stormonds are worthy of my acquaintance, it would be downright affectation, nay rudeness, to shun them. Though I am rich, I have certainly not acquired those riches by any extraordinary merit that I possessed. My marriage with Lord Primrose being merely a thing of an accidental nature, I

cannot arrogate any merit to myself from that circumstance, you know, Mrs. Evelyn; therefore I am not proud of the acquisitions which fortune has bestowed, though I shall ever be grateful to Providence for the blessings it has so liberally dispensed. Now, dear Madam, return to the rectory as fast as possible, if you please; leave me to eat my mutton chop alone, if you are not inclined to partake of it with me; then dispatch your letter to Walter; tell Fanny to remember my instructions; and in the evening send Mr. Evelyn to me."

"Send my husband to you, Flora!" cried Mrs. Evelyn, unable to resist the fascinating and beseeching look which was given her by one of the loveliest beings in creation; "you are positively the most saucy little creature in existence, to ask me a favour which no other mortal but yourself dare to ask—the company of my husband, of whose society, you well know, I have not half an hour in the course of the whole four and twenty hours; for what with deaths, marriages, and christenings, added to which the time he devotes to the composition of his sermons, the company of Mr. Evelyn is a rarity indeed."

"And yet some parsons do not give themselves as much pains," cried Flora, laughing; "for I have been told that they get their sermons ready made!"

"As the undertaker procures ready made coffins, I suppose, Flora," answered Mrs. Evelyn. "Well, my love, if we cannot live by our trade, it were far better to leave it off. Nevertheless, I will send Mr. Evelyn to you, and you may adjust that point with him in the best manner you are able."

"And neither sermons nor coffins will be the subject of our discussion, I promise you, dear Madam," cried Flora; "for neither of them, in my mind, will lead us to heaven, if we have not something better to offer at the throne of mercy than the mere outward semblance of what should wholly reign within."

"You are incorrigible, Flora," said Mrs. Evelyn, as she retreated fast towards the door.

"But nevertheless sincere, Madam," answered Flora; and with these words Mrs. Evelyn departed to her peaceful and happy home; rendered happy by the smiles of an affectionate husband, and the attentions of a dutiful and amiable child.

At her entrance, the mystery of Flora's postscript was fully explained. She had slyly deposited in the hands of Fanny Evelyn the sum of five hundred pounds, as a present for her brother, on condition that her father and mother were not to be informed of the affair; but when closely questioned by Mrs. Evelyn, Fanny was under the necessity (though unwillingly) of betraying the secret, and acknowledging the noble benefaction of her amiable friend, at which it was impossible to restrain the most lively impressions of admiration and gratitude, inspired by the unexampled conduct of the young and lovely widow

"And oh, may the object of her *second choice* prove but worthy of the treasure whom he may fortunately possess," cried Mr. Evelyn, his eyes glistening with a tear; "and may every succeeding year of this excellent creature's life meet the reward of her exalted virtue."

On that very evening he paid a visit to the lovely

widow, who received him with her accustomed smile of fascination; but on his very first entrance, when he would have warmly expressed his gratitude for past favours, she gently placed her finger on his lips, while she sportively exclaimed—

"I will hear nothing you have got to say about Fanny's letter to Walter, unless you mean that I should quit the room instantly, my dear Mr. Evelyn. I told Mrs. Evelyn, before she went away, what I wanted you for, and I will positively talk of nothing else while you are here. Now pray tell me if you know any thing of this very dashing and fashionable family, who have lately come to reside at the lodge, and by whom I am invited to-morrow evening to a ball and supper. Do you know any thing of them, my dear Mr. Evelyn?"

To which Mr. Evelyn, who could not forbear laughing at the rapidity with which this was uttered, and her reason for so doing, replied—

"My dear creature, and can you really imagine that I have any sort of association with beings so eminently above my humble station and capacity, who would blush to own that they had a poor country parson among the circle of their acquaintance? I have indeed long heard of the arrival of such distinguished personages in our humble village; but whether they have *graced it* or *disgraced it*, I really cannot tell. The Countess of Stormond and her two daughters were at church last Sunday, and that is all I know of them."

"And how did they behave?" cried Flora, laughing.

"Tolerable enough," replied Mr. Evelyn; "only that one of the young ladies fell asleep, and the other fainted away, during the course of the service, which reduced

them to the necessity of leaving church before it was concluded."

"And do you call this *tolerable* behaviour?" cried Flora.

"Why when ladies faint away, we may suppose that they cannot help it," answered Mr. Evelyn.

"And when they fall asleep, it is no proof of their being very highly gratified," cried the still laughing Flora. "But what shall I do with this ball and supper? Shall I attend these good people, Mr. Evelyn?"

"Act as your heart directs you, Flora, and you will scarcely do wrong," replied Mr. Evelyn; "I do not see the slightest impropriety in your going to the Countess of Stormond's, if you think it will afford you any gratification."

"It will at least afford me variety, and that I love," cried the lively Flora; "so I shall certainly go, if you will send Fanny to me to help me to dress, in which I am a perfect novice."

"I would also recommend you to have the assistance of Mrs. Evelyn into the bargain," added Mr. Evelyn, as he arose to take his leave.

"Yes, I will have them both, if you please," cried the widow; "pray tell them to come early to the Priory, that I may consult their tasteful fancy on so important an occasion."

To this proposal Mr. Evelyn agreed; but he had scarcely taken his departure, before the unexpected guests of the lovely widow arrived,—General Oldstock and Ensign Conway; when a meeting took place of a very different description to what she had experienced before, and in which she suddenly sustained a much

severer conflict of her feelings than could possibly have resulted from the pleasure arising only from the happiness of unexpectedly beholding a dear loved relative, whom in early childhood she had so fondly and affectionately regarded, and had long lamented as being no longer in existence; but it was the mistaking him for the so greatly dreaded Lord Arundel, that had occasioned so strange a fluttering in the breast of the young and lovely widow, and excited every sensation but that which was pleasing, when she contemplated the man before her as the master of her fate, at least one in whose hands her husband had invested so singular an authority, as to be a spy, if not a ruler, over her affections.

It was no wonder then that Flora did not immediately perceive the family likeness, which so strongly presided in the benevolent countenance of General Oldstock; and that, supposing him to be this very formidable personage which he represented himself to be, her reception of him at the first was so distant and constrained; and that even the pleasures of the ball were forgot in the disorder and flutter of spirits in which she was so suddenly thrown by the unexpected arrival of so unwelcome a guest.

But the happy explanation having once taken place between her and her beloved uncle, every uncomfortable sensation immediately disappeared, and was reflected only by the most brilliant hues of heartfelt joy on her charming countenance, and expressed in a thousand different sentences that afterwards escaped her. Yet Flora certainly did not mention the engagement she had bound herself in to the Countess of Stormond

till the ensuing morning to her uncle, when, after the kind enquiries he had made respecting the family of Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn, he proposed taking a ride over to the rectory, and presenting the *dead man alive* to his old and worthy friends.

"And you will go with me, won't you, Flora?" cried the General, turning to his lovely niece, whose cheeks now glowed with the brightest tints of vermillion. "Gad zookers! I will let them see that Hector Oldstock is alive and hearty, after the newspapers have signed my mittimus out of the land of the living for this many a long year. It will be an excellent joke, won't it, Flora? Just as the parson is seated in his study, composing one of his grave sermons, to stalk into it, and tapping him on the shoulder, exclaim—'Well, friend Evelyn, how dost do on *this side* of the river Styx, my old boy, since I have been journeying on the *other*, where, not finding things so comfortable as I could wish, I have even come back again to try my fate a little longer with you sons of clay, which I intend this day to moisten with some good old stingo; in which I will drink the health of all my friends.' Then how the parson will stare, while he examines me from head to foot, to see whether I be ghost or no; though I have a shrewd guess that he would take me for downright flesh and blood after all."

"And which I should take great pleasure in convincing him of, my dear uncle," cried the lovely widow, "by accompanying you to the rectory this moment, was I not prevented by a prior engagement I had unfortunately formed before your arrival at Stanmore Priory, yesterday evening. I protest I wish I could now

break it off with any tolerable decency; but it is too late; and I expect Mrs. Evelyn and Fanny here every moment to assist me in dressing for so important an occasion."

A card was now placed in the hands of the General by Flora, which expressed the following words:—

"The Right Honourable Countess of Stormond solicits the distinguished honour of the company of Lady Primrose, to join a select party of her friends to a ball and supper, on the evening of the eighteenth instant, to commemorate her eldest daughter, Lady Sophia Russel, coming of age. The Countess of Stormond will feel much regret should any prior engagement have intervened to deprive her of the pleasure which she has so long anticipated from being honoured with the charming society of her beautiful and accomplished neighbour, and of the happiness of cultivating her more intimate acquaintance."

"Stormond Lodge, seventeenth instant."

The General had no sooner finished the perusal of this highly complimentary and flattering card to his lovely niece, than he rapturously exclaimed, turning to Ensign Conway—

"Why, Henry, we are at home, my boy, in the very bosom of a family, to whom we have never yet been introduced, but of whom both you and I have listened to such extraordinary praises. Do you remember the wounded officer who was borne to my tent on the night of that cursed affray on the ramparts?"

"But who, notwithstanding every medical assistance

that was given to him, most unfortunately died of the wounds he received in that desperate encounter, in less than ten days afterwards," rejoined Henry. "Most certainly I do, General, and commiserated his fate along with my brother soldiers, very truly and sincerely, for he was one of the finest young fellows I ever beheld."

"He was so," cried the General; "and he was no less than the son of the Earl and Countess of Stormond, to whose title he would have succeeded, had he lived long enough; for the Earl has only been deceased within the period of two years, and bore a most excellent and exemplary character. The loss of his brave and amiable son preyed hard, it was said, upon a constitution naturally weakly and enervated, and very rapidly carried him to that bourne, from whence no traveller has ever yet returned. But, gad zookers!" added the General, (on perceiving that the countenance of the charming Flora had somewhat relaxed into a shade of a less lively hue, from the grave manner he had spoken of the death of the young soldier,) "let us have no more touch of the doleful for the remainder of this day and night at least. What is past cannot be recalled, so it would be sheer folly to dwell upon it, because my Flora is going to a ball, you know, and it would look cursedly out of the fashion to see her divested of her usual flow of spirits when every body else is laughing around her; and I hail it an auspicious omen of future enjoyment to you, I assure you, my dearest love, in now having an opportunity so seasonable for cultivating a friendship with this amiable lady and her respectable family, whom I have every reason to suppose are in all respects worthy of inspiring reciprocal esteem, and exciting mu-

tual confidence and congeniality of disposition, without which it is very certain that friendship cannot truly exist at all. There is indeed a false meteor, whose imposing address and insinuating manners sometimes makes it pass for such to those unpractised and untaught in the ways of a deceptive world, who would fawn and flatter you to the face, while they are laughing at you behind your back; but curse me if a true friend can long be concealed, or a treacherous hypocrite long escape detection. General Sabastian, of the fifty-third regiment, has long been on terms of the most familiar intimacy with Lord Stormond's family, and he assured me that there was not a more amiable woman in existence than the now widowed Countess, and her young and lovely daughters, of whom it may naturally be supposed she is very passionately fond, and indulges beyond what most fashionable mothers do; but this we may attribute to the untimely death of her only son, to which so rapidly followed the death of her husband. These are events which were likely to subdue the mind of the Countess with peculiar softness and sensibility, and to render the surviving branches of her family dearer to her widowed heart than ever. However, go my Flora, and with that arch and love-laughing countenance of thine diffuse the sweetest charm of joy and mirth around them, and tell them when you were born you came in a sun-beam, where no cloud staid a moment to dim or darken the brilliant influence of its bright enlivening ray, and that the very flowers which sprung up on your natal day looked more gay and freshly, and hailed Flora for their little queen, because she was the gayest and the fairest among them all."

"Nay I protest, uncle, if I am not there, that you will make me the vainest—" cried the blushing Flora, "if you thus continue to flatter me. My husband never flattered me—my uncle must not."

Flora hesitated and smiled.

"But I will if I like though," cried the General, laughing. "Gad zookers! I will say what I please to my own niece, and nobody shall prevent me."

"Well, but I am so delighted at this account you have given me of the Stormonds, you cannot conceive, dear uncle," rejoined Lady Primrose; "now I can go without the least apprehension of incurring the slightest censure of mixing in these gay and fashionable parties, which so frequently attend the Countess's crowded assemblies, since my uncle so highly approves of my new acquaintance. How fortunate that you should happen to know something about them. Poor Mr. Evelyn could give me no information on the subject, though I sent for him on purpose to make the necessary enquiries. To be sure Mr. Evelyn talked of his being a poor parson, as a pretext for not knowing these great and fashionable people better; and so you know, uncle, there the matter dropt, Mr. Evelyn took his leave, and you and this young gentleman soon afterwards arrived."

"Most opportunely, it appears, my love, to satisfy any doubts of the propriety of your visiting with the Countess of Stormond and her amiable daughters," uttered the General; "notwithstanding which the remark of Evelyn was a just one. Poor parsons are the last objects in the world to mix in the society of great personages; though we frequently find rich ones gene-

rally patronised by exalted rank, and sedulously courting their acquaintance. Shame to the land which gives us birth! It is not even the vices, the enormities, or indiscretions of which they are found guilty, which have the influence of expelling them from the smiles of fashion; and while fashion sanctions them, they will always appear with the most unblushing effrontery in the gay and thoughtless round of dissipation, in despite of the morals which stamp an indelible disgrace upon them. Because they are abundantly blessed with the gifts of fortune, they creep as it were into polished society, which call themselves refined; but, alas! to which purity of principles and heart no more belong than the base counterfeit coin, that would borrow the virtues and semblance of the golden ore. We will say, by way of excuse for such gross and palpable deception, that it is not perceptible; but why not perceptible? Because truly it is neither searched into, nor enquired after. So it remains and continues to the very end of its successful career—a vile imposture on common sense, decency, and virtue; leaving to the rising generation a rare example of fashionable celebrity, which has cost the possessor but a few thousands dexterously managed, perfectly to establish himself in favour of."

"Surely, my dear uncle, you are now satirising the follies of mankind in too high a colouring," cried the lovely widow, smiling at the warmth which General Oldstock now betrayed; "for alas! who would enjoy riches, if they were always thus so disgracefully applied!"

"Ah! who indeed?" rejoined Ensign Conway, with a suppressed sigh; "to which I would prefer the most

wretched state of poverty, the most abject state of dependence; nay, owe to daily toil and drudgery the very means of support."

"I did not wish to have it inferred, that it is always so," retorted the General; "Heaven forbid that it should; still I will defend the truth of my assertion by declaring, that it is more frequently so than otherwise; and that the superior claims of merit and virtue are denied, while those of unblushing effrontery and impudence are ultimately encouraged, and consequently rewarded."

At this moment the names of Mrs. and Miss Evelyn were announced, and of course were immediately admitted to the presence of the lovely widow; though, on the first entrance to the apartment of Lady Primrose, Mrs. Evelyn started back with the most involuntary surprise, and Fanny with timidity and the most blushing diffidence; for they had not expected to behold their lovely friend in familiar conversation with two gentlemen, both of whom were stationed close at her side. The sight was wholly new to her; and, with a retiring curtsey, she exclaimed—

"Pray pardon the intrusion I am guilty of, dear Lady Primrose; I was wholly unconscious that you were engaged with company, or Fanny and I would——"

The sentence remained unfinished; for to the encreasing embarrassment and utter astonishment of both Mrs. and Miss Evelyn, Flora burst into a most immoderate fit of laughter, while she exclaimed—

"Dear Mrs. Evelyn, pray forgive me, forgive me for laughing; but I protest if you were to impose gravity on me at this moment, I could not support it for my

whole existence. I was born laughing, my uncle positively affirms; and here is my uncle before you, to answer to the truth of that observation."

"Your uncle, dear Flora!" cried Mrs. Evelyn, surveying the countenance of the General with emotions of surprise and curiosity, which was little short of wonder; "you had but one uncle, dear Flora, that I can remember, and he is——"

"In *propria persona!*——I am that very identical personage that Flora has represented to you, Madam," vociferated the General, extending his hand at the same instant to Mrs. Evelyn; "I am Hector Oldstock, whom you so well knew in former days; that cracked, thoughtless, hair-brained, extravagant, wild, young passionate dog, whom Mr. Evelyn used to preach his grave lectures to on reformation, but in vain. Here he is, with all his imperfections on his head; who, after the cursed newspapers have long tolled out his funeral knell, returned alive and hearty once more to his native land—a general in the army; who departed from it, ten years ago, a poor lieutenant. This is *fortune de la guerre*, my dear Madam, as the French call it; and on my arrival at Oldstock Hall, I found that the capricious jade was not yet willing to desert one, who has been all his life not courting but absolutely running away from her sunny smiles; for the first piece of intelligence I received from old Mother Mildew was that Sir Oliver, my brother, was defunct, and that Flora (whom I came on purpose to see) was married, and, what was still more fortunate, (for I must ever deem it so, when a young girl marries an old man, my dear Mrs. Evelyn,) a *widow!*"

"And you found your sister Lydia the same as you left her, General," cried Mrs. Evelyn, who was now seated, with Fanny by her side, but who could scarce repress laughing at the whimsical pleasantry which was so strongly depicted in the countenance of the old General, as he gave this account of his arrival at Oldstock Hall; and he replied to Mrs. Evelyn in the same humourous tone:—

"Why yes, Madam, I found my sister Liddy (as I do suppose) in the full blossom of virginity, at the age of *fifty-three;* an honour which I have no doubt but she would very gladly have resigned many years ago, had any one been half so willing as she to have sacrificed at the temple of Hymen. However, the old girl and I be now upon a better footing than formerly. I have plainly told her what she is to expect if she continues to conduct the management of affairs at Oldstock Hall; and she appears perfectly content to subscribe to the plans I have proposed. In short, Liddy and I have parted most excellent friends, and it will only be her own fault if we do not remain so to the end of our existence. I told her I would not rest till I had seen Flora; so off I came without further ceremony; and here I am, at the service of all my old and worthy friends, to whose society I have returned, after a long and weary campaign, not quite so rattle-brained a fellow, perhaps, but not a bit the wiser. Curse me if I don't think I am a greater fool than ever; for there's that impudent gypsy, my niece, has been laughing at me ever since I have been her guest."

The General having now taken a moment's breath, stole a few glances at the smiling and still blushing

countenance of the silent but no less gratified Fanny; and turning to Mrs. Evelyn, jocosely exclaimed—

"Why positively, Mrs. Evelyn, you are the most ill-bred woman in existence, though I always gave you credit for being the most elegant."

"And how is it, General, that I have recently suffered so considerable a change in the favourable opinion with which you so greatly honoured me," cried Mrs. Evelyn, laughing, though perceiving in what direction the General's eyes had strayed.

"And you *deserve* to suffer, Madam," retorted the General, "for not having thought it an essential point to introduce your lovely daughter (whom I take that young lady to be) to my acquaintance. So I will introduce myself to her, and that young gentleman, (who is an adopted of mine, Mrs. Evelyn,) without either your permission or further preface. Gad zookers! I have a dislike to all prefaces, even in books; the title-page being the best letter of recommendation, in my opinion after all, to the merit of the author. So I will begin, Miss Fanny Evelyn, (for Fanny I know is your name,) by presenting to you Ensign Henry Conway, whom I have brought all the way from Bengal, to shew as a living curiosity to all my friends in Great Britain—a young soldier, who has been in more engagements than he has numbered years, and has fought in them too. Gad zookers! Henry has fought with the courage of the lion, while to a fallen enemy I have seen him shew the gentleness of the lamb. And, Henry, this is Miss Evelyn, the only daughter of the worthy Rector of Stanmore, whom ten years ago I remember one of the prettiest little girls in the world, but whom

you will not admire the less because she is now bloomed up into one of the prettiest of women."

Ensign Conway bowed to Miss Evelyn, and Miss Evelyn curtsied to Ensign Conway; but it was well for both that their eyes, at this precise moment, did not exactly meet, and that Cupid, for this once, escaped his aim; for the blushes of the lovely Fanny were concealed under a large straw bonnet, and those of the young soldier were hid in ambush behind a vase of flowers, which stood on a table between them; or what would have become of the heart or the eyes of poor Henry, had they been fixed on such a figure and such a face as that with which nature had graced the Rector's blooming daughter?

Not that Fanny Evelyn had either a face or figure more beautiful than that of Flora. No, it was critically far less so; but critical beauty is not always the most admired by men. Fanny's style of countenance being pensive and often grave, as Flora's was arch and mirthful, it might be deemed generally more interesting. Though she did not attract observation so suddenly as Flora, yet it might be probable that the impression she made was more lasting, and therefore the harder to be effaced from the recollection than even the luxuriant beauty of the sprightly Flora. Both, however, were confessedly charming; and though they did not please alike, it would have been difficult to have decided which of these lovely creatures had the advantage in pleasing most all who came within the pale of their magnetic influence and powerful attractions. Miss Evelyn, however, was considerably taller than her fair friend; neither had she the almost bewitching symmetry of Flora's

round and polished limbs. She was more delicate too in the colour of her complexion, had blue eyes, and exceedingly light and beautiful hair; in fact, a painter would have represented Fanny Evelyn as a Madona, and Flora as a Hebe—for both were the loveliest of their kind. What the young soldier thought of these two lovely young women, we cannot yet surmise; but it is certain, that when Miss Evelyn appeared at dinner without the large bonnet which had before nearly concealed half of her fair face, that Henry caught himself looking at her much oftener than he did at Flora, who certainly never looked more transcendantly lovely than she did on this day, destined to make her first *entree* into a fashionable *coterie* of high life and modish manners: notwithstanding which, Henry still continued to snatch stolen glances at the soft, pleasing countenance of the gentle Fanny, which the General slyly observing in a whisper to his young friend, Henry evinced a colour in his cheeks deeper than his scarlet regimentals, while he endeavoured (but in vain) to avert his eyes from her, and look at every body round the table with particular attention, but the object who had thus suddenly excited so deep an interest in his heart.

CHAPTER VI.

—— "Whenever I see her, she never looks at me—that's a sign of love! Whenever I speak to her, she never answers me—another sign of love! Whenever I speak to any body else, she seems to be perfectly easy—that's a certain sign of love!" DAVID GARRICK.

IT was an unusually early dinner to which Flora had this day assembled her beloved friends, for which she had most readily obtained the permission of her fond uncle, because he was well aware of the important business which was to take place so immediately after it—the dressing for the ball; on which, before they received a summons to dinner, both the taste of Mrs. and Miss Evelyn were consulted by the lovely widow. However, there was some difference of opinion, as might very naturally be expected among three ladies; but the contested point remained with Mrs. Evelyn and her fair daughter; and Flora, taking a hand of each, stood like the beautiful goddess of pleasure, laughing between them; her roseate lips and love-beaming eyes seeming to say—

"Which of you must I needs follow?"

And the debate being whether Flora should go in or out of mourning, Fanny exclaimed—

"By all means listen to mamma first, Flora, and to me afterwards."

"I will positively listen to neither of you, if you keep me here much longer a prisoner between you," cried Flora, laughing; "consider, we have left the gentlemen alone almost these three hours, and have not yet decided on what dress I am to figure away in to-night. Now do, my dear Mrs. Evelyn, let us go down stairs, as my uncle will be quite out of all patience."

"Well but, my love, you must certainly make up your mind now about your dress," rejoined Mrs. Evelyn; "for you will have but little time to spare after dinner."

"Now or never, then," cried the lively widow, springing out of the circle they had made around her; "your choice for the dress, and Fanny's for the ornaments. Bennet, take out my white satin dress, which is trimmed with the pearls and French lace, and put the mourning one aside. Indeed, Fanny, say what you will, it is positively too grave for so gay a party."

"But you look so lovely in that half-mourning dress, Flora," cried Fanny, with a beseeching look.

"Lovely! Nonsense, Fanny. Have you too learned to flatter me, as well as my uncle?"

"It is not flattery, but the real truth," uttered Fanny; "but I won't say a word more when there are two to one against me; it would be wholly useless. If you will promise me to wear the diamonds, that my lord presented you with on your wedding day."

Flora hesitated, coloured a little, but at length replied—

"Well, to please you, I will, though I don't please myself, I promise you. I dislike to appear so conspicuous, and to wear diamonds merely because every body knows that I can afford to do so."

The summons to dinner prevented a reply from Miss Evelyn or her mother, which, we have already observed, was served up at an early hour; and soon after the cloth was removed, and the wine and dessert put upon the table, the ladies begged permission to retire for the important business of the toilet, but not before the General demanded a treaty with Mrs. Evelyn, which was as follows—that she and her lovely daughter were to favour him and his young friend with their company for the remainder of the evening, and to take their tea with them; to which Mrs. Evelyn was about to reply, when Flora, taking her hand, coaxingly exclaimed ·—

"Ah! do, dear Mrs. Evelyn, oblige my uncle. A few hours can make no difference, you know, in the order of the day to Mr. Evelyn, who, when he hears what has detained you and Fanny at the Priory, will be so rejoiced that you staid to keep my uncle company. Nay, you shall not go, I protest. Besides, do you think I am going to stay out all night at the Countess of Stormond's? No, indeed, I intend to return home at a very early hour, and shall order the carriage to attend at a seasonable time. It is my first visit, you know, to my fashionable neighbour, and it would be improper to stay there beyond the bounds of decency."

"Beyond the bounds of a fiddlestick's end," cried the General, laughing; "you shall stay there as long as other people do; for I will be bound to say there is no one invited to the Countess of Stormond's who do

not subscribe to the rules of decency as much as you, my love. As to Mrs. Evelyn, I shall lay an embargo on her, whether she likes it or not; while Henry shall use military discipline also with the fair Fanny. We are soldiers, you know, and accustomed to take garrisons by storm, if they won't surrender on reasonable terms."

The affair was now adjusted without the slightest opposition being made to the General's request. Mrs. and Miss Evelyn were to stay for the remainder of the evening, and during the absence of the lovely widow, were to enliven the General and the young soldier with the charms of their conversation. Whether Henry was pleased with this arrangement, we cannot tell; but his fine, intelligent, and expressive features were animated with a smile of ill-concealed triumph at the victory which the General had obtained over Mrs. Evelyn; and we do believe that the charming Fanny partook in some degree of the pleasurable sensations which at that precise moment possessed the breast of the young military hero. But mamma did not know it. Was mamma a witch? How should she know what was passing in the bosom of her fair daughter?

When the ladies had adjourned to the dressing-room, Bennet had obeyed the orders of her Ladyship, and the white satin dress was displayed to the best advantage; and surely nothing could be more exquisitely beautiful or delicate than the simple costume of so elegant a dress, or better calculated to display, in all her striking loveliness of shape, the fascinating object it was this night to adorn. It was made for the last birth-day of Lord Primrose, and sent from the most fashionable

dress-maker's in town, at an expence the most considerable, for the whole of the trimmings were ornamented with pearls and the finest lace. The lustres which confined the waist, and fastened the bosom, were also of the most costly pearls; and when completely finished, it was sent down by the private order of his Lordship, and concealed by him till the morning of his birth-day, when he suddenly entered the dressing-room of his young and lovely wife, and taking the beautiful dress from the box, most unexpectedly presented it to her view, and surprised his adored Flora, by informing her by whose order it had been executed and so beautifully ornamented.

"Oh! my dear lord, how could you think of going to such an enormous expence?" cried Flora, at the same moment that she passed the highest encomiums on his Lordship's elegant taste.

To which his Lordship, kissing the snowy little hand which he had been keeping a prisoner for a considerable length of time in his own, fondly replied—

"Because, my love, I intended you to wear it on this day, which is my birth-day; and because I feel well assured that it will be the last I shall ever pass in the society of my lovely girl. On my next birth-day I shall be far from Flora, in a happier and a more blessed state than earthly existence."

His Lordship paused, and a mournful interval of silence prevailed—mournful to the tender and affectionate heart of the lovely Flora, and she burst into a flood of tears.

"Ah! why, my dear lord," uttered she, "do you think it necessary, on this day, to indulge in such

mournful reflections? Ah! why is your beautiful gift accompanied with so melancholy a presage, to me how insupportably painful! how inexpressibly distressing!"

His Lordship gazed with tenfold rapture on his young and lovely wife, at receiving this convincing proof of the tender sensibility of her heart, and the excellence of her disposition; and dispelling the impression of all gloomy forebodings which had on that morning so suddenly assailed him, he smiled on the beautiful sunbeam which was reflected from the bright eyes of Flora, and for her sake entered into the spirit and hilarity which was kept up at Stanmore Priory in the course of that ever to be remembered and joyous day.

As Lord Primrose had predicted, it was certainly the last birth-day he was ever destined to pass with his beloved and lovely Flora; and the white satin dress had never been worn since. While Mrs. and Miss Evelyn were commenting on the beauties of it, and admiring the delicacy of the pearls with which it was so tastefully decorated—yes, even while the gay and sprightly Flora was employed in the task of arranging those lovely dark-brown tresses with which nature had so luxuriantly adorned her, an unconscious and involuntary sigh escaped from her snowy bosom, which was sacred to the memory of her departed lord; for she remembered the day on which he had bestowed so strong a proof of his regard and delicate attention towards her; nor had she yet forgotten the impressive words of his Lordship when he presented her with this beautiful dress.

Perhaps it was in consequence of this mournful retrospection of past events that had in some degree paled to a lesser tint the beautiful and brilliant colour

which had only a moment before rested on Flora's cheek, and for an instant appeared suddenly to check the unceasing hilarity of her youthful spirits; yet not willing that her beloved friends should perceive it, while she herself felt its gloomy influence steal imperceptibly over her senses, she talked and laughed with more than her usual gaiety, feeling more sensibly than ever that she was overacting a part, which, on this evening, she had but little pretension to, *a gay and lively widow*. The eyes of Mrs. Evelyn glancing towards her lovely features, when Flora was completely arrayed in all her ornaments, she exclaimed, after Fanny had tied on the diamond necklace—

"Well now, my dear Flora, do try to be a little serious, if it is only for ten minutes; you will find it of great service to you; for you will positively exhaust your whole stock of spirits, lively and prodigious as they are, if you thus rattle on without intermission, even before you go to the Countess of Stormond's, my love. Now sit down and compose yourself."

"Well, so I will, dear Mrs. Evelyn," cried Flora, instantly obeying the exhortation of her kind and amiable monitress, and affecting only to look what she really felt herself to be—serious and thoughtful, for which she could in no way account, excepting by retracing the period when her dear lord was living, and indulging her in every wish of her fond heart. "Yes, dear Mrs. Evelyn, I will certainly obey you, for I protest I do feel a little jaded, and that's the truth of it. My heart, too, pants, and is strangely fluttered; yet I know not at what, unless it is the thoughts of going among a set of beings, whom I never saw, and do not know."

"That is the very reason, my love," replied Mrs. Evelyn, now perceiving that Flora actually looked much paler than usual, which remark was whispered to her daughter, but neither of them noticed it; "and you are fluttered because you are going to encounter a scene wholly new to you—the splendour of a fashionable drawing-room; but this scene will pass over you quickly, as the sunbeam darts upon the humid flowers; it sparkles there for a moment, but smiles do not always play upon its surface, Flora; nor does it always leave the sky unclouded or unchanged."

"Ah! can you think that any gay scenes, however brilliant or dazzling, will ever have the power of changing me?" cried Flora. "No, no, dear Mrs. Evelyn, Flora will ever be the same as when you first formed her youthful mind. I have treasured your early lessons in my heart, from which nothing shall ever erase them."

To which Mrs. Evelyn, with a soft responsive sigh, replied—

"Heaven grant that it may not, my love."

"And do you fear it, Madam?" uttered Flora, reproachfully.

"My dearest creature, why does your mind suggest a thought that would do me so much injustice?" uttered Mrs. Evelyn. "I think nothing of you but what you so greatly deserve, and that is my approval in all that I have hitherto beheld. But come, a truce to morality; let us hasten down stairs to your expectant uncle."

"Yes, a truce to all sombre reflections, for the present moment," cried Flora, springing up with renewed

energy and increased spirit, as she linked her arm into that of Mrs. Evelyn's, and made her *entree* into the drawing-room, where the General and the young Ensign were playing a game at chess, which, on the entrance of the ladies, was quickly laid aside; and though certainly no human being in a female shape ever looked more enchantingly lovely than the beautiful widow, it was very perceptible in what direction the eyes of Henry unconsciously strayed, as he very gallantly placed a chair for Miss Fanny Evelyn not very far distant from his own; which mark of attention, at this moment, totally escaped the observation of the General, who was too much occupied with gazing on the dazzling appearance of Flora to regard any other earthly object beside her while she continued in the room, which was not many minutes; for soon the carriage drew up to the door, when, drawing on her gloves, she protested to her uncle that she trembled so she could scarcely support herself. The General, looking at her most attentively, exclaimed—

"Pray, Mrs. Evelyn, give the dear girl a glass of wine and a biscuit before she departs; for what with putting on all this finery, and thinking of the party she is going to meet, the dear angel is flurried out of her senses."

"Indeed, indeed, I am flurried, dear uncle," cried Flora; and, to the inexpressible surprise of all present, burst into tears.

"Confound the ball! if this is the consequence of it," cried the General, forcing her to drink the wine; "why Flora, my angel, what is the meaning of all this?"

In the meanwhile both Mrs. Evelyn and Fanny en-

deavoured, by every consoling effort in their power, to compose the agitated spirits of the lovely widow; who, quickly recovering her self-possession the same as she had lost it, protested to her exceedingly alarmed and affectionate friends, but more especially her adoring uncle, that she could in no way account for the strange disorder which had so suddenly assailed her; "and which I have felt all the time I have been dressing for this ball," uttered she, again smiling with her wonted vivacity; "so I rattled away to Mrs. Evelyn and Fanny without mercy, and have actually fatigued myself with these extraordinary exertions. How foolish and ridiculous! Was it not, dear uncle? for I protest there is nothing the matter with me. But come, I shall go now and rally my spirits when I arrive at the Countess's."

"Indeed! but you shall rally them before you go there," cried the General; "for I shall ride with you as far as Stormond Lodge, where I hope you will have no more occasion for these extraordinary exertions, as you call them, during the remainder of the evening. 'Tis in fact extremely silly of you, Flora, because you are going into company, to infect yourself with these ridiculous fears. But all this is owing to the cursed mode of life to which your late husband has accustomed you. Gad zookers! he has bred you up like a singing-bird, only to be caged, when he ought to have set you at liberty, and given you plenty of it, I say. Confound such jealous old misers; they are no better than——But I won't rail."

"No, uncle, you have railed sufficiently," cried Flora, in a reproachful accent.

She uttered not another sentence; and the General, taking advantage of the universal silence which prevailed, snatched up his hat which hung upon a peg, and seizing the hand of Flora, hurried her to the door, and from thence to her Ladyship's carriage, which was open to receive her; and bidding the coachman instantly to proceed to the Countess of Stormond's, seated himself beside her, and were out of sight in a few moments, leaving the party they had quitted, and particularly the gentle Fanny, much affected by the dejection of spirits so sudden in her lovely and amiable friend, until whose return from the Countess of Stormond's, she felt that she should endure the most tender anxiety and alarming apprehensions.

Not so Mrs. Evelyn, who knew that Flora would not long indulge in sober sadness, for which there was no apparent cause, and that this weakness was merely a constitutional habit, in which, since her marriage with Lord Primrose, she had been permitted to encourage rather than solicited by him to break herself of. Flora, even in childhood, had discovered this weakness, and had been severely chid by Mrs. Evelyn for it; for however amiable it may appear in the eyes of some romantic females, excess of sensibility is always a weakness. It frequently places us in the most ridiculous situations; and instead of exciting pity, often produces involuntary disgust.

But to proceed. What the General said to his lovely niece, during their short ride, or what Flora said to him, we cannot tell; but it is certain, that when the carriage stopt at Stormond Lodge, the lovely widow had resumed her most bewitching smiles of charming

vivacity; and bidding the General good night, was immediately conducted to the entrance of the splendid hall, which opened into the apartment for the introduction of the names of the expected guests; but no sooner was that of Lady Primrose announced, than a universal whisper took place, and in a few moments the Countess of Stormond appeared to receive and welcome the approach of her lovely visitant.

There is in all well-bred personages an unaffected air of affability and ease, which can never be mistaken for bold and impudent familiarity, which is equally divested of precise ceremony or cold formality; and with a smile of the most complacent sweetness, the Countess advanced, and extending her hand towards Flora, exclaimed—

"Dear Lady Primrose, I exceedingly rejoice to see you. Ten thousand welcomes to Stormond Lodge. Ah! may I indeed cherish the hope that the pleasure I now feel in beholding you is mutual."

"Your Ladyship does me great honour," cried the blushing Flora, returning the cordial salutation of the Countess with equal fervour, though with a bashful timidity which at this moment she could not entirely divest herself of.

The easy polished elegance of her amiable and accomplished hostess, very soon imparted to Flora a degree of confidence which she felt that every moment would inspire her with towards this lady, who again taking her hand, begged to have the happiness of conducting her to the presence of her friends.

"You will behold none but my most intimate friends, dear Lady Primrose," uttered the Countess; "but few

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Flora and Miss Evelyn viewing Stormont Lodge.

strangers resort to Stormond Lodge, actually invited by me; for my daughters are young, and, like yourself, are but mere novices in the fashionable world, in which I really have no ambition that they should act a very conspicuous part, for which nature does not seem principally to have formed them. My Sophia is indeed spirited and lively, but my Emmeline is the very counterpart of my late dear husband, and is sometimes grave and pensive even to a fault. Poor girl! she endured much from the loss of her only brother, to whom she was most fondly attached. But this is a theme, my dear Lady Primrose, on which I dare not reflect for a moment; and these sombre subjects are surely the most unseasonable I could adopt for entertaining my lovely guest."

As the Countess had not yet relinquished the hand of Flora, she proposed conducting her to the ball-room.

"I have left my girls wholly to preside there till my return," said she; "but I protest one of them is already weary with the seat of honour I have assigned her; for there is Emmeline coming towards us."

At this moment a lovely female figure advanced, and was immediately introduced to Flora, as the youngest daughter of the Countess of Stormond, who curtsied gracefully to the warm and friendly welcome which the sweet girl gave her; after which she exclaimed—

"Oh! I protest, mamma, your absence in the drawing-room can no longer be dispensed with, and you must positively attend this moment, or incur a penalty even from the Marquis of Rosalvie. Sophia, too, is so impatient, and the dear old Duchess so waspish."

"Under all these considerations, you perceive, my

dear Lady Primrose, the absolute necessity of our immediate appearance before these impatient good folks," cried the Countess, smiling; "though they will all perceive that I have the *fairest* excuse in the world to plead for the cause of my absence."

So saying, the smiling Countess took the lovely hand, which actually trembled, within her own, and led her beautiful guest to the entrance of the ball-room, while the youthful Emmeline, who had preceded them, softly unclosed the door, and whispering the name of Lady Primrose, all eyes were immediately attracted towards her.

CHAPTER VII.

"No woman of the world was she;
She cares not for its tinsell'd toys,
Its pomps no thought of hers employs.
* * * * * *
The music that the wild wood fills,
With rapture her pure bosom thrills;
To her the opening spring's first rose
More brightly than the diamond glows;
Who, when she loves, loves once and ever;
Though all else change, she changeth never."

ALTHOUGH all eyes had been irresistibly attracted by the brilliant and beautiful luminary which now appeared in the gay drawing-room of the Countess of Stormond, they were as immediately withdrawn when they beheld the unaffected blushes of timidity which crimsoned her transparent cheek, and the downcast eyes which duly looked on the ground as a relief from the admiring glances which in all directions were now poured in upon her; for no sooner had the Countess announced the name of her lovely guest, and introduced her to her several distinguished visitants, than Flora was assailed from every quarter with congratula-

tions and compliments, which she had been so unaccustomed to hear or receive during her abode with her recluse husband, that she was nearly overwhelmed with confusion, and her heart fluttered, and tears almost swam in her eyes, before Lady Stormond had an opportunity of quietly stationing her beside a venerable lady, who, regarding her with an air of the most anxious enquiry, instantly made room on her approach, exclaiming—

"Heaven be praised, child, that your trial is now over, and that you have so well escaped from the star-gazers of a fashionable, crowded drawing-room of fine and fashionable folks, who look as eagerly for a *debutante* to make her appearance amongst them, as they do going to the opera to see a new actress display her abilities in an arduous and difficult character."

Flora was now seated next to the venerable lady who had so singularly addressed her, whom the Countess then introduced as the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, while she smiling exclaimed—

"For this very reason, your Grace, I have enlisted my young and lovely guest under the shelter of your venerable wings, where I know she will be free from all invasion, till she has perfectly recovered from the unavoidable bustle and confusion which always prevail on a first introduction into these crowded parties; but surely my sweet friend Lady Primrose will not conclude that I give any encouragement to these naughty folks, who won't stare quite so much at her when they behold her more frequently as the guest of her whom she has this night so greatly honoured with her presence; but indeed, my love, their offence is pardon-

able; for who can help looking at you, I wonder, when the temptation is so great?"

"But they need not have stared the poor child out of countenance, in order to gratify their propensity to curiosity," cried the Dowager gently, which at any other moment than the present would have induced Flora to have laughed heartily; "but where is your daughter Sophia? I protest she has quitted me this half hour to go in search of you, and you are now arrived before her. The Marquis of Rosalvie, too? They are both truants; and I shall rate them soundly when they do come, for leaving an old woman like me to take care of myself."

The Countess laughed, and declaring that she would instantly go in search of the runaways, left Flora under the care of her venerable guardian, who, turning on her again a look, in which a peculiarity of expression was strongly blended, enquired how she felt herself after the fatiguing ceremony she had gone through; and with modest ingennousness, the lovely widow replied—

"I thank your Grace, I am more collected than at first. I am really ashamed of appearing so little used to fashionable etiquette; but my Lord Primrose was averse to giving me any instructions on that head, so of course I have remained profoundly ignorant."

The *naivete* which accompanied this speech produced an almost involuntary smile from the Dowager, but at the same time it induced her to take a more intent examination of the countenance of the youthful speaker, stampt with so much innocence, simplicity, and beauty; and she exclaimed, in a half serious, yet half playful tone—

"Well but, my love, you will not have cause to deplore this profound ignorance very long, since you have taken your first lesson to-night of this necessary appendage to exalted rank; in which I do not wonder in the least that your late husband did not initiate you into the mystery of, because he himself could not have told you any thing about it, and was in this respect as profoundly ignorant as you just now professed to be. I knew Lord Primrose exceedingly well, and do not believe that he had one atom of fashionable folly attached to his character; yet for all that, he was worthy of imitation, perhaps better than all his *tonish* acquaintances; nay, I am convinced, that as far as merit and humanity could extend, he had an advantage over many of them. But we may be overheard, my love, in so numerous an assembly of personages; and I have made choice of a somewhat sombre subject for so young and lovely a creature, when mirthful scenes only here invite her attention."

"Oh no, your grace," uttered Flora, with involuntary warmth and feeling, which in the same instant illumined the whole of her inexpressibly lovely features, "whatever mirth may invite, or joy offer, to amuse my fancy, the subject you had chosen, and was pleased to dwell upon, can never be disgustful, never unwelcome. The virtues, the merits of my dear departed lord, can never cease to awaken the deepest interest in a heart on which they were engraven, while from my memory they can never be erased."

The Duchess made no reply to so conclusive a testimony of the worth of Lord Primrose, because at this precise moment a group of personages were approach-

ing towards them; but the venerable lady cast a look at our lovely heroine fully expressive of the favourable sentiments with which she already regarded her.

In this group was the Countess of Stormond and a young lady to whom Flora had not yet been introduced, leaving on the arm of an uncommonly elegant young man of fashion, whose countenance, though animated, and beaming with intelligence, was apparently regarding the splendid and festive scene before him with an air of indifference, if not of apathy. Nor were his eyes fixt upon the lovely speaker, who, in a loud whisper, addressed him in the following words, which instantly suffused the cheeks of Flora with a colour bright as the orient blush of morning:—

"But you must come and look at her. Mamma says she is the loveliest creature she ever beheld in existence; so does Emmeline. Every body has seen the pretty widow but you, my lord, and you——"

"Would much rather gaze at the stars than at beautiful women," was the reply of this lord, whose name was as yet unknown to the blushing Flora.

"And yet both are confessedly divinities," uttered a voice at the elbow of the then laughing Lady Sophia; for it was the eldest daughter of the Countess of Stormond who was leading her unwilling companion, on whose arm she was leaning, to the spot where Flora and the venerable dowager were seated.

The personage who had made the last remark was Sir Charles Ratcliff, a young Baronet of high fashion, just come into an estate of seven thousand a-year, of the most imposing address and insinuating manners, to which was added a handsome face, and no inelegant

figure, which he knew how to display to the best advantage. For the hand of this gentleman many fair creatures had contended; but somehow or other this favourite of Fortune and of Venus had been insensible to the shafts of Cupid, and actually, like Narcissus at the fountain, had fallen in love with his own pretty person more than with any other beside; though rumour whispered that of late his attentions had been directed to Lady Sophia Russel; yet rumour was false, for he cared as little for Lady Sophia as Lady Sophia did for him, and was merely admitted at the gay parties of the fashionable Countess, because his gaiety contributed to enliven and amuse her guests.

Sir Charles, however, had an additional motive on this evening for being one of the party at Stormond Lodge, and that might be easily guessed at; for the young widow had long been the object of the most resistless curiosity in the neighbourhood of Stanmore, as well as the theme of conversation at Stormond Lodge, by the gay and fashionable guests who resorted there, to which Sir Charles Ratcliff had always appeared to listen with an air of apathy, which he was very far from feeling in reality; for vanity suggested, that if once he obtained an opportunity of being introduced to her, she could be no more insensible to the attractive influence he held over the fair sex, than others with whom he had hitherto succeeded so fortunately, that he could *ask and have*. Besides, here was an additional claim to his attentions. The young widow was not only beautiful, but rich, uncommonly rich; and this last consideration was with him an essential and almost indispensable requisite in the catalogue of a woman's

virtues; and certainly the only one which would ever induce him to sacrifice his pretty person at the temple of Hymen. He had some difficulty, therefore, in concealing the pleasurable sensations he experienced when Lady Sophia had informed him, a few days previous, that Lady Primrose had accepted of her mother's invitation, and was actually expected at Stormond Lodge the ensuing evening.

But Lady Sophia must have had no eyes at all (and she really had very fine ones) if she had not discovered that this intelligence was highly satisfactory to the feelings of her so suddenly surprised auditor, which not only flushed his cheeks with a colour of the brightest crimson, but produced an unusual sparkling of his brilliant dark eyes; and her Ladyship exclaimed—

"My heavens! how you colour, Sir Charles. You actually appear transported with the news I have just given you."

"Who? *me* colour, Lady Sophia!" uttered he; and conscious that he did so, blushed considerably deeper than before: while her Ladyship, enjoying the embarrassment and confusion he was taking such extraordinary pains to conceal, laughed most immoderately, and replied—

"Nay, is it necessary to repeat my words, or is it quite consistent with good breeding, Sir Charles?"

To which he replied with his usual address—

"My dear creature, it is positively your own fault if I have blushed at all."

"And why so, pray?" archly enquired her Ladyship.

"Because it was reflected from your own lovely cheek," cried the insidious Sir Charles; "which at

this moment wears the semblance of the blushing rose, I protest I never saw your complexion so enchantingly brilliant."

"And I protest I never heard you utter a compliment half so ridiculous," said Lady Sophia, still laughing; "or one so little likely to impose on my credulity; for it is not true, Sir Charles, you know it is not true; your very countenance confesses it; and had you ever seen Lady Primrose, I should have suspected, from the embarrassment you betrayed, that you had actually fallen most desperately in love with her."

"What a ridiculous and absurd supposition!" cried Sir Charles, affecting now what really seemed absolutely necessary, a perfect disguise and change of his feelings; and immediately rising to take his leave, he exclaimed with an air of *nonchalance*, which did more than any eloquence he could have displayed—"If you are determined to think so, Lady Sophia, I must positively decline making one of the party (though so particularly invited by your charming mother) on the evening which is to commemorate your birth-day, if thus I am to be taxed with charges of which I am wholly innocent. I really have never (as you observe) beheld the lady in question, about whom you think I am so exceedingly solicitous, nor do I feel the smallest inclination; and with this sentiment, I wish you, Lady Sophia, a very good morning."

"Then you don't feel inclined to join our brilliant party which is expected here to-morrow evening, do you, Sir Charles?" cried Lady Sophia, with a most provoking smile playing on her lip; "I shall tell mamma then of your intention, as we shall have one guest less

to provide for, you know, on that occasion; and where there are so many expected, the decrease instead of the increase will be quite convenient."

There never was a speech so likely to add to the embarrassment of the already confounded Baronet, and he stammered out—

"I shall probably see the Countess myself in the course of this evening, and will spare your Ladyship the trouble of being so communicative on my account, Lady Sophia," cried Sir Charles, and instantly departed.

Her Ladyship, almost convulsed with laughter, related to the Countess and Lady Emmeline her morning's conversation with Sir Charles, and the amusement she derived in detecting him of a great portion of his fashionable finesse, at which the Countess laughed heartily, while she exclaimed—

"Poor Sir Charles! Then you have actually offended him in the tenderest point, his personal vanity and conceit, of which the pretty young gentleman has no small share. How barbarous of you, Sophia, when fashionable report has already given Sir Charles to you as an accepted lover."

Lady Sophia blushed deeply, and was by no means gratified by this remark, and answered her mother with some warmth—

"Then I am sure, mamma, that fashionable report has greatly erred, if they suppose any such thing; for of all the men in the world, Sir Charles Ratcliff would be the last to appear in the character of a lover of mine."

"I am glad to hear you make so wise a remark, my love," cried the Countess; "for be assured that Sir

Charles is also the last whom I would select as a husband for my daughter; but you know in fashionable society, the creature is really useful, and it would appear singular to omit him in the cards of invitation, because we see every body else inviting him, whether they like him or not. He is a mere butterfly of fashion, and if he does no good he does no harm. Besides, he is gay, volatile, and constantly in spirits; so he is a necessary evil in our little *coteries* and evening parties, which sometimes want variety to amuse them."

"But positively I suspect, mamma, that Sir Charles has a design upon the young widow, he betrayed so much satisfaction when I told him that she was to make one of the party to-morrow evening; and yet how artfully he evaded it!" cried Lady Sophia, laughing.

"I believe that any design he would have upon Lady Primrose would totally fail of success," answered the Countess; "she is a magnet considerably above the attraction of such a being as Sir Charles Ratcliff."

Here the conversation on the merits of the pretty Narcissus ended, to give place to subjects of a far more pleasing and interesting nature—the elegant arrangements of the splendid ball for the succeeding evening. They saw no more of Sir Charles Ratcliff till his name was announced in the number of their gay visitants. He had been one of the first who had eagerly pressed forward to obtain a sight of the lovely widow, but he took care to be the last to express his admiration of her uncommonly lovely person; and fearful of again encountering the raillery of Lady Sophia, he avoided any opportunity of addressing her till one or two more had joined him in approaching this almost universal

object of admiring attention; for such was Flora from the very moment she had made her entrance into the room.

The men styled her a perfect Venus, and even the ladies were obliged to acknowledge that she was *pretty enough*; which term being actually pronounced by the ladies, was a very sufficient proof of the superiority of the charms of Flora; for it very rarely happens that praise is ever extorted from the lips of envy or jealousy, but on this evening it proved so. There was not a dissenting voice in the whole room on the beautiful face and figure of the youthful widow, save only one, and he could be no judge at all of the power of her attractions, for he had never once condescended to bestow a look on her, much less a syllable; and this personage was no other than the elegant young man of fashion on whose arm Lady Sophia was leaning, the Marquis of Rosalvie, whose manner and expression had so exceedingly put our lovely heroine to the blush, as, now joined by Sir Charles, they approached her and the venerable lady with whom she had enjoyed so much rational and pleasing conversation; and, almost in a whisper, Lady Stormond introduced her eldest daughter, then Sir Charles Ratcliff, and last of all the Marquis of Rosalvie to the notice of her lovely guest. The Marquis, only noticing the graceful curtsey which was now made to him by the blushing Flora, by a cold and formal bow, immediately reminded Lady Sophia that the dancing was just going to commence in the adjoining apartment, and whether she intended to honour him with her hand?

Surprise and some doubt was expressed in the coun-

tenance of Lady Sophia; (for it was well known that the Marquis was not fond of this fashionable amusement;) and she laughingly pronounced—

"And are you really serious, or are you only hoaxing, my Lord?"

"Hoaxing, Sophia, is not among the list of my propensities," uttered the Marquis, in a somewhat reproachful accent.

"Yes, but it is, though," cried her Ladyship; "I appeal to her Grace if you are not daily in the habit of practising it on the inhabitants of Stormond Lodge."

"Oh! my love, you must not expect me to answer for my nephew's propensities," cried the Duchess of Pemberton, with a placid smile; "nor will I pardon them when they are absurdly ridiculous, any more than I do in other folks. Ormond is an exceedingly amiable young man, when he is in his proper element; but take him out of it, he frequently appears singularly whimsical, even to his admirers and most attached friends; and the dear boy then vexes me."

This was not uttered by the venerable personage without an evidently suppressed sigh; but it did not escape the observation of Flora, who was still sitting next to her, the object of the now almost infatuated gaze of Sir Charles Ratcliff, who was leaning over the back of the superb ottoman, on which the ladies were seated; and in reply to this speech of the Duchess, he sarcastically pronounced—

"And do you call your nephew, the Marquis of Rosalvie, a boy, Duchess? 'Pon honour, he would not thank you, were he now present, for so prodigiously flattering a compliment."

To which her Grace instantly replied, but not without eying the young Baronet most contemptuously—

"And was my nephew here, Sir Charles, I am thinking he would have more good sense and better manners than to censure an affectionate relative for having uttered truths; and as to compliments, it is certain that I do not deal in them, and I repeat, that my nephew to me is a mere boy, and you, a mere baby, Sir Charles."

The fashionable Baronet looked mortified by this retort, not over courteous; but as the Duchess of Pembroke was a distant relative of the lady of the mansion, and was besides in the habit of saying what she pleased, and to whom she pleased, he did not choose, for more potent reasons than one, to hazard her displeasure, at a season of such universal hilarity, as it was not only probable but true that if he had done so, he would never have been received as a free and accepted guest at Stormond Lodge. Besides, far more pleasing contemplations filled and elated the bosom of the youthful Baronet than what cold and frigid age had inspired him with; for the dancing had already commenced in the adjoining rooms, and sounds of the most joyous and enchanting harmony floated on the ear, and delighted every sense. Lady Sophia and the Marquis of Rosalvie had already winged their flight to this gay scene of splendour and festivity, and the Countess only remained with Sir Charles by the side of Flora, and the Duchess of Pembroke. All the youthful party on one side of the room had suddenly disappeared, and the more mature were preparing to sit down to cards.

Now Flora was a most inimitable dancer. Nature

had formed her for this charming recreation, and when at school she principally delighted in it; but on her marriage with Lord Primrose, this amusement had ceased, much to the mortification of poor Flora, whose very heart and feet bounded to the sprightly melody of the pipe and tabor. She had indeed frequently accompanied her lord to balls and public assemblies; but before they set out, he peremptorily laid his commands on his young and lovely wife that she should not dance, however strongly solicited; and she dared not dissent from his so constantly avowed opinion, that it was highly improper for a married woman; to which his Lordship always added—"But you may play at cards, if you like it, Flora! There is no harm in that, when I sit at the same table with you."

To which she had artlessly replied—

"My gracious, my lord! then how greatly you differ in opinion from my father. Now he always said that dancing was a cheerful and innocent amusement for young people, while he persisted that playing at cards was an equally pernicious and improper one."

Lord Primrose coloured deeply, and betrayed no inconsiderable warmth and petulance in making the following enquiry of the blushing Flora:—

"And did your father also class waltzing among the most delicate and proper amusements for young ladies?"

"I never heard him speak of waltzes," cried the now deeply blushing and half offended Flora; "but I believe that Sir Oliver Oldstock had as nice and as delicate sense of propriety as most men at his mature season of life."

"Or rather, my love, you mean to say, as Lord Prim-

rose," uttered his Lordship, smiling, and forcibly taking the hand of his little offended beauty, and while he pressed it fervently to his lips, added—"I do not in the least doubt of Sir Oliver's prudence, my love, nor have I any of my Flora's; but you shall never persuade me that if your father had a young and lovely wife like you, he would sanction her waltzing in a public assembly, with all the fashionable coxcombs of the present day that familiarly approach her. No, Flora, this I will not believe while I have the evidence of my senses; and had I a daughter, much more a wife, I would sooner see her enter the lists with a professional dancer at the opera-house, than see her waltzing with every man of fashion in a public assembly. To me it is the most repellant, disgusting sight in nature; and my Flora would not surely now hazard my good opinion of her chaste and delicate mind, by her ever expressing a wish to adopt a species of amusement to which I have so utter an aversion."

"I wish to adopt nothing that you, my lord, disapprove of," cried the lovely Flora, resuming her wonted good humour and vivacity: but after this neither waltzing or dancing was ever chosen by her as a subject of conversation with her dear lord.

Now the case was widely different; and though she had certainly no intention of waltzing, she did not see why she should refuse dancing, if any body came to ask her. As her ears caught at every fresh movement the sound of the melodious strains, she actually felt impatient to join and make one of the festive party! But how could she do this with any propriety, or express any inclination for dancing, when no one as yet

had asked her? It was very strange; perhaps it was not the fashion to ask widows to dance. In short, Flora was deliberating on this odd conjecture, when Sir Charles, wishing to secure the beauteous prize while it yet remained within his grasp, suddenly exclaimed, on perceiving that a large party of *elegantes* were rapidly approaching and instinctively drawn to this quarter of the room—

"Lady Primrose, may I have the unspeakable felicity of obtaining the distinguished honour of your fair hand for the next quadrilles?"

At first Flora hesitated, and blushed excessively. She did not know whether it was proper for her to dance, or whether Sir Charles Ratcliff was a proper partner for her or not; yet she did not see why, as being the guest of the Countess of Stormond,

"She who once deliberates is lost," cried the familiar Baronet, and without further ceremony seizing the lovely hand which would instantly have been withdrawn, had not the venerable Duchess, almost guessing at her thoughts, in a low whisper, exclaimed—

"Nay, my love, there is nothing objectionable in your dancing with the Baronet, since he has been so fortunate as to supersede all other claims to so distinguished an honour conferred upon him; except indeed that he will be the object of their envy throughout the room. And look here is a multitude of applicants already approaching."

"Well, I really had no intention of dancing," cried Flora, who had never risen from her seat, Sir Charles still retaining her hand with all imaginable triumph, exclaiming—

"By all that's beautiful, but you must."

"Shall I, Lady Stormond?" cried Flora, blushing.

"Not if disagreeable to you," answered her Ladyship, half smiling at her perplexity; "but surely, my dear Lady Primrose, you would not persist in the barbarous resolution of not making one of the festive party, who are so anxiously expecting you to join them."

At this moment Lady Emmeline and a numerous party approached. The sweet girl was almost out of breath with the exertion of the lively dance; but tripping up to the side of Flora, she exclaimed—

"Surely your Ladyship intends honouring us with your presence in the ball-room. Every body is so anxious to obtain you for a partner, you cannot imagine. Here is Lord Clairville, and half a dozen more, all coming petitioners to you."

"Which you perceive, Lady Emmeline, it is not in her Ladyship's power to grant," cried Sir Charles, with a sort of conceited triumph, as he viewed with unspeakable satisfaction the chagrined and mortified looks of his rival contenders in so fair a prize; "I am the conqueror for this lovely hand for four quadrilles at least;" and giving Flora time only to curtsey to Lord Clairville, and decline the compliment he intended her, he flew off with the powerful magnet of attraction which had assembled them all there, amidst the really envious sneers of his fashionable companions.

"Conceited ape!" murmured Lord Clairville.

"Incorrigible puppy!" uttered a second.

"The butterfly of an hour!" whispered a third.

But in compliment to the lovely and respectable lady

of the mansion, none of these contemptuous epithets, so lavishly bestowed, were permitted to reach the ear of the Countess of Stormond, or her amiable daughter, who, notwithstanding, was indulging in a hearty laugh with the Duchess of Pemberton at the expence of the disappointed lords, and the impudent effrontery of Sir Charles Ratcliff.

"I protest that the easy impudence of that creature often amuses me," cried the Countess, laughing.

"Lord, mamma, how can you think him amusing?" uttered Lady Emmeline; "to me Sir Charles Ratcliff is the most bold, familiar, and conceited young man in existence. To see the looks he cast on Lord Clairville and the Honourable Captain Ponsonby, when he took the hand of Lady Primrose to conduct her to the ball-room; as if he were the only object worthy of sharing her attentions. But I am very sure that Lady Primrose will not like him; now do you really think, your Grace, that Lady Primrose will ever like such a being as Sir Charles Ratcliff?"

The youthful Emmeline looked very anxious in the face of the Duchess for a reply; while the Countess gently reproved the lovely girl for demanding so improper a question.

"You are too young, Emmeline, to enter into discussions on the merits or demerits of young men of fashion," uttered the Countess; "nor do I approve of your hasty decision on characters you know so little about. If every personage of exalted rank were to give their sentiments so freely as you have done on Sir Charles Ratcliff, they would be severely censured, and perhaps accused of ill nature for their pains; and the

young Baronet is certainly a prodigious favourite with all our fashionable acquaintance."

Lady Emmeline was silent, and coloured deeply. Not so the venerable lady whose opinion she had so ingenuously asked, and with whom the youngest daughter of her friend was a much greater favourite than Lady Sophia; and, with her usual bluntness of expression, she exclaimed—

"Fie, fie, Countess, you would not surely teach your daughter the art of disguising her sentiments, when no disguise is necessary. Let the child speak the truth, which can neither be shamed nor blamed, in the present instance, except by ideots or fools, who are silly enough to flatter this young boy of fashion, merely because he has just jumped into an estate of seven thousand per annum, at the expence of sincerity and common sense, and who has not one atom of merit, and I much doubt a shadow of virtue to recommend him to the possession of it. I for my part readily adopt Emmeline's opinion, and think Sir Charles Ratcliff the most egregious coxcomb I ever beheld; and as to his engaging the attention of Lady Primrose further than through the mazes of a dance, the supposition would be highly absurd, and, in my mind, greatly derogatory to the character and principles, as well as the choice, of so apparently sweet and amiable a young creature."

"How exquisitely lovely is the young widow; is not she, my dear Duchess?" cried Lady Stormond.

"And how irresistibly engaging and unaffected, mamma," uttered Lady Emmeline; "every body is enchanted with her, except——"

Lady Emmeline made a full stop, and betrayed so

much embarrassment and confusion from the unguarded expression she had conveyed, that the Duchess, feeling for her situation, and fearing that her young favourite might again encounter the displeasure of her mother, instantly made a pretext of sending her in search of her nephew, the Marquis of Rosalvie, to which the delighted girl immediately assented, and was out of sight in a moment. Leaving the two matronly ladies to enjoy a few moments of uninterrupted chat together, we will follow the light footsteps of the youthful Emmeline into the ball-room, where she made strict search after the Marquis of Rosalvie, but could not find him there, nor yet in the adjoining apartment, which was set apart for the refreshment of the company; and while Emmeline was enquiring of every one she met if they had seen any thing of the Marquis of Rosalvie, let us accurately endeavour to state the situation of our lovely widow on her first entrance into this gay scene of splendid festivity, which for a moment perfectly dazzled as well as enchanted her by the fairy scenes of beauty, tasteful elegance, and variety it displayed; for here were magnificent mirrors, Grecian lamps brilliantly illuminated, and flowers of almost every description wreathed in the most fantastic shapes, breathing the most delicious and odoriferous perfumes; while the enchanting sounds of the well-selected bands of music resounded on every ear, and vibrated on every heart that was not actually insensible to its powerful and magnetic influence, as it stole over the charmed senses, as the "sweet South breathing from a bank of violets."

One heart alone seemed unconscious of this power-

ful melody which had charmed all others, and one eye alone gazed with apathy on the brilliancy and splendour of this gay scene, which spread such fascination and smiling beauty around it; and this heart and this eye was the Marquis of Rosalvie's! who, on the entrance of Sir Charles Ratcliff, just lifted his eye from the ground to see who it was that had accompanied him to the ball-room, and perhaps that eye rested for a moment on the face of Flora—and perhaps Flora observed in the self same moment that the Marquis was looking at her, and fancied that it was not a look either of approbation or pleasure with which he had for one single moment so intently regarded her, and that he turned away almost immediately as her name was pronounced by the so greatly honoured and gratified Sir Charles Ratcliff, as he led her up to the delighted and expecting party, who were just arranging themselves in the respective order for the commencement of the quadrilles. They welcomed the lovely stranger with every mark of respect and deference which was exclusively due to her exalted rank, while others slyly congratulated Sir Charles on the prize he had been so fortunate to obtain.

But for the sensations of poor Flora we cannot possibly account; for they were wholly inexplicable even to herself, as they were new and painful, in the supposition that she was the object of dislike to the only being in the room whose breast she could wish to have inspired with different sensations towards her, and that was the relation of the venerable lady with whom she had been so agreeably conversing. He had apparently turned away with involuntary disgust at the

sight of her, when every other mortal counted her attention; and in doing so, he coloured deeply, and she was conscious that he had occasioned her to colour as deeply, and feel a regret that she had never felt before, in believing that she was the object of his indifference, if not of absolute dislike. But Flora was not left long to cherish vain regrets, or dwell on any unpleasing reflections; for the music had already struck up to the tune of a favourite quadrille of fashionable notoriety; and without considering who was looking at her, or whether she was looked at at all, she gave her hand to Sir Charles, and entered into the spirit of the lively figure of the dance so enchantingly, that nothing but the praises of the lovely young widow resounded through the whole room, and "what an exquisitely lovely creature," burst from the lips of the admiring throng.

To do but justice to Sir Charles, he was the only one in the room who could have kept up the spirit of dancing with Flora; and never did he display his abilities to better advantage; for it was a species of accomplishment in which he had always excelled. Nor did he resign the hand of his lovely partner till the end of the fourth quadrille; and so much had the spirits of Flora been exhilarated with her exertions in the lively dance, and the sprightly notes of the melodious instruments, that when Sir Charles again conducted her to a seat, and stationed himself close beside her, the charming vivacity of her natural disposition illumined her lovely features with the most bewitching smiles, which was greatly increased by being joined by the amiable and interesting Lady Emmeline, who entreated that Sir

Charles would make room, and give her a place beside Lady Primrose.

"Unkind Lady Emmeline!" uttered Sir Charles, with more warmth and gallantry than occasion warranted; "and would you rob me of a station which monarchs would envy me the possession of?"

Flora blushed and looked grave, while the laughing Emmeline replied, as she took the offered place of the young Baronet, which he had resigned with evident reluctance—

"No, indeed, Sir Charles, I don't wish to rob you of any thing but what you can very well spare, and have no exclusive right to; but remember, that monopoly is not the order of the evening here; and I protest some other claimants for the hand of your lovely partner are already coming to put you in mind of it."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Write me down a fool,
That talks much, thinks less,
Professes greatly, yet means nothing.
I would sooner listen to the yelping cur
That bays the moon." SHAKESPEARE.

THE personages who now approached Flora were Lady Sophia, Lord Clairville, and the Honourable Captain Ponsonby. The former, who had been engaged in dancing till the present moment, and of whom Flora had seen but little, now blushingly apologized to her mother's lovely guest, that the indispensable necessity she had been under of joining the dancers had deprived her of the pleasure of obtaining any conversation with her during the early part of the evening; but that she was now come to have the honour of passing a few minutes in her charming society. "Though I have brought two petitioners along with me," added her Ladyship, archly smiling, "who would very willingly deprive me of the charms of your Ladyship's conversation, if they succeed in engaging the honour of your fair hand for the next quadrilles."

Lord Clairville then almost immediately approached Flora, and in a beseeching tone solicited that she would grant him that distinguished favour; but what was his Lordship's evident surprise, chagrin, and disappointment to hear her exclaim—

"You honour me most highly, my Lord; but I am not positively certain that I shall dance again to-night; but if I do I—I—I am engaged to Sir Charles Ratcliff for the next ensuing quadrilles."

Flora actually blushed deeply, as she pronounced these words; but it was occasioned by the contemptuous look with which this truly amiable and accomplished nobleman surveyed his too fortunate and successful rival, on whose flushed cheek and sparkling eye there appeared an expression which he could by no means conceal, of conscious triumph, almost bordering on an insolent display of vanity, conceit, and affectation, which was insupportable to good sense, rationality, and good breeding; and when Lord Clairville, tired of his disgusting and familiar attempts to enter into conversation with him, bowed respectfully to the lovely widow, and silently withdrew, without deigning to notice the effrontery of this fashionable coxcomb, and also taking his friend along with him, Flora did not feel perfectly satisfied with herself for having refused Lord Clairville, and accepted of so inferior a substitute for this accomplished lord, whose mental graces appeared equally correspondent to a fine formed person and elegant set of features. In short, Flora by no means relished the familiar looks and manners of this supercilious, trifling coxcomb, to whom she had by mere accident engaged her hand for the whole of

the evening, and of whose company she was not likely to be relieved during the remainder of her visit at Stormond Lodge, which she determined to quit as soon as ever her carriage was announced to be in readiness for her departure.

Not that Flora had been disgusted with the pleasures of the evening, or dissatisfied with the reception she had met with there from the amiable mistress of the mansion and her lovely daughters, the younger of whom she particularly admired, and felt solicitous to cultivate a more intimate acquaintance with; but in Lady Sophia there was certainly something not congenial to her taste. She had beauty, but it was of the bold and masculine kind; she had intellect, accomplishments, and manners, which, however easy, polished, and elegant, were repellant rather than pleasing to the extreme timidity and simplicity of her own. Lady Sophia, too, had evidently a vein of sarcastic humour in her conversation, even on the most trifling subjects, which, being blended also with a haughty consciousness of the superiority of exalted rank and fortune, gave to the *tout ensemble* of her person and features an air that rather chilled than inspired confidence towards her. But the sweet Emmeline had none of these fashionable propensities; her very look was native ingenuousness, simplicity, and truth, while her manners were perfectly free from affectation. Her face was critically less beautiful than that of her sister's; but it was a thousand times more interesting from the softness and sensibility it displayed; and she did not court praise, because she truly merited it.

Lady Sophia had laughed prodigiously at the disap-

pointed hopes of Lord Clairville and Captain Pontonby, and congratulated Sir Charles on his being the fortunate victor of the prize so much sought after, in a style of such flippancy, and with such little regard to the deep blushes which had again overspread the lovely face of Flora, that she felt seriously vexed that she had again consented to dance while she continued in the rooms. Neither did she like to be so distinguished by the young Baronet's attentions, or the object of Lady Sophia's flippant raillery; and whispering to the gentle Emmeline, that she should be glad when the quadrilles were over, she remained almost perfectly silent to the effusion of compliments with which she was overwhelmed by Sir Charles on one side, and to the unmeaning ones bestowed by Lady Sophia on the other.

Whether the countenance of Flora (always ingenuous and expressive) exhibited some external signs of weariness, or, what was more likely, apathy to the subject of their discourse, we know not; but certainly it induced Lady Emmeline to exclaim—

"My goodness, Sophia, you talk so loud, and rattle on so strangely, that I am sure every body must hear you all over the room."

"Well, and it is ten to one if listeners ever hear any good of themselves," answered her Ladyship.

"From lips divine, who can listen but with rapture and delight?" cried Sir Charles, bowing, with an air of self-approbation, more gratifying to his own feelings than to any beside him.

"But we shall be observed presently," replied Emmeline; "we are so already. There is the Marquis of Rosalvie standing exactly opposite to us, and he is look-

ing at you, Sophia; and oh, my heavens, how angry he looks!!"

"Looking at me!" exclaimed Lady Sophia; "how you err, Emmeline. Look again, and you will find that I am not at this precise moment the object of his Lordship's profound meditation."

All eyes were now directed to the Marquis, who, with folded arms, was leaning against one of the arcades of flowers, and certainly occupied in this musing attitude in contemplations of no very pleasing kind; for it was on the face of Flora that he had been intently gazing for the space of the last ten minutes, and it was equally certain that the expression with which he gazed did not indicate any very flattering sentiment in favour of the lively widow; as, when observed, he suddenly withdrew his eyes, and almost immediately darted into the midst of the motley group which surrounded him, till he was no longer to be seen. But whither he went, no one enquired, or seemed anxious to enquire; the peculiar habits and singular dispositions of this extraordinary young nobleman, being too universally known to have become, on this evening more than any other, the object of wonder or public curiosity; he choosing to appear or disappear whenever he pleased, without any comments being passed on the eccentricity of his character: for what else could it possibly be deemed? It was well known that he possessed strong intellect, sensibility, and feeling; he was deficient in none of these, nor in any of the leading principles that form and establish the character of an upright honourable man. Consequently the Marquis was no maniac, no enthusiast—for that he disavowed;

no misanthrope, for he constantly mixed in society, and sought the abodes of his fellow men. All, therefore, that the Marquis could be called was a strange, eccentric man; for which some laughed at him, others admired him, some pitied him, but few joined in universally condemning him, and even those few were not of the rational or discriminating kind.

But what were the sensations of Flora respecting him who shall define? since it is certain that she could not define them herself, or account for the universal trepidation of her whole frame as she caught a second time the glance of the Marquis of Rosalvie, exclusively directed to herself, for no such glance had he given to any other object in the room; and it was one of no flattering kind, nay, it plainly indicated displeasure and dislike; but to what cause she could attribute it, or why she should feel so deeply mortified and so sensibly hurt by it, she could form no reasonable conjectures, since, not knowing the Marquis of Rosalvie, and never having beheld him till this evening, she could not possibly have approached him in the nature of an offence. Had the Marquis of Rosalvie heard any thing to her disadvantage? He could not. The tenour of her whole life had been innocence and truth; since the death of Lord Primrose her conduct uniformly discreet; her actions, thoughts, and words such as could reflect nought but credit to herself and benefit to her fellow creatures.

To what then could she owe this strange, this mysterious, this unreasonable dislike of her in the breast of this relative of the kind and venerable personage with whom, in the early part of the evening, she had been

so agreeably conversing? She exclaimed, on the disappearance of this extraordinary being, to Lady Sophia, who had been seized with an involuntary fit of laughter at the surprise, which was so strongly blended with regret, in the lovely countenance of Flora—

"Is not the Marquis of Rosalvie thought an extraordinary and eccentric character, Lady Sophia?"

To which her Ladyship replied—

"Yes, prodigiously extraordinary, my dear Lady Primrose; and if he did not look so very much like a man, I should hardly take him to be human, he has so much of the *ethereal spirit* in his composition; but I believe, the creature is but mere flesh and blood after all, or rather he has as many faults and frailties as the rest of his precious sex."

"Oh, Sophia, how can you be so severe against one of the most faultless, most perfect beings in creation? Indeed, indeed, Lady Primrose, my sister was only jesting when she pronounced him otherwise," uttered Lady Emmeline, with extreme earnestness, but not without a roseate blush crimsoning her fair face and neck in the same instant.

At which both Sir Charles and Lady Sophia laughed immoderately; the former exclaiming with a too perceptibly envious sneer—

"'Pon honour, Lady Emmeline, you have eulogised your favourite most famously, though you will find but few to second your opinion that the Marquis is the most perfect being in creation. I have certainly heard him compared to the moping melancholy owl, that affects wisdom; but the man who is wise, is merry also. Life was not made for sober sadness: and curse me if

I think the Marquis of Rosalvie any wiser than the rest of us."

"In your estimation he may not be considered so, Sir Charles," cried Lady Emmeline, a deeper blush tinting her face; "but I never heard his rationality doubted; and with respect to comparisons, what think you of the man who apes the monkey? Is not that comparison as odious as the owl?"

Sir Charles bit his lip, coloured excessively, and remained silently looking at his gold repeater, which most fortunately put him in mind of the hour destined once more to behold him the envied partner of the lovely widow. It was not, therefore, either convenient or expedient to answer the spirited retort made on him for his saucy speech, by the youthful Lady Emmeline, who was not by any means a favourite, because it was on more occasions than one that he had smarted under the lash of her Ladyship's well-directed and spirited sarcasm, when he had been passing so freely his censure on the character of an object, with whose individual merits it was arrogance and presumption for him to put in competition his own paltry insignificance; and turning towards Flora, with a most insinuating smile, he exclaimed—

"Now then, I claim that lovely hand, as a rich reward for the insufferable penance I have endured for this half hour at least. Thank Heaven, I am relieved at last. The quadrilles are again commencing; permit me to conduct your Ladyship to the ball-room."

"Why you rude creature," cried Lady Sophia, "what penance have you endured, except by listening to our conversation, in which to be sure Emmeline and I have

played the principal parts? Lady Primrose has said but little, and you——"

"Have said enough to put me out of the good graces of Lady Emmeline for a month to come," replied Sir Charles; "she is angry whenever any one dissents from her opinion on the merits of the Marquis of Rosalvie, who has imposed on me the penance of looking at him this half hour."

"And why did you look at him at all, if you found it so repellant to your feelings, pray, Sir Charles?" cried Lady Emmeline, with spirited warmth.

"Because he was looking at Lady Primrose in a most particular, and, as I conceived, in a most absurd and ridiculous manner," retorted Sir Charles. "I appeal to Lady Primrose herself for the truth of this assertion, and to Lady Sophia too, who must have equally observed him."

Lady Sophia tittered and laughed, and Lady Emmeline looked grave; but Flora, thus appealed to, and more glad than angry that the looks which the Marquis had cast upon her had been remarked by more than herself, shone in her native character of truth and simplicity, and without a moment's hesitation, replied—

"I cannot contradict your assertion, Sir Charles. The Marquis of Rosalvie has more than once looked at me this evening in a manner for which I am wholly unable to account; and never having seen the gentleman before, I will confess that the impression of such extraordinary looks to an entire stranger has struck me forcibly; for they were looks of contempt, of aversion, which, till this evening, I never encountered, and cannot possibly guess the cause of."

"Of contempt—of aversion?—and to *you*, Lady Primrose?" cried the lovely Emmeline. "Impossible! you surely must have misinterpreted those looks, the meaning of which, though I cannot inform you of, certainly could not have conveyed the impression you speak of."

"But Lady Primrose had the use of her eyes, I presume, as well as your honourable absent friend," uttered Sir Charles, with a sneer.

"And that he is absent, I regret deeply," replied the spirited Emmeline; "for were he present, I am very certain he would very quickly justify himself in your Ladyship's opinion, and from the aspersion of Sir Charles Ratcliff."

"'Pon honour it is a mere matter of indifference to me," cried the young Baronet, "did it not relate to the lovely lady in question; but that apart, the singular and frequently rude habits of this extraordinary personage would pass by with utter insignificance, as being an object wholly unworthy of my attention. I have other pursuits and other objects of a far more transcendant nature to attend to than him or his looks either."

Lady Emmeline looked deeply hurt; but recollecting that Sir Charles Ratcliff was her mother's guest, forbore to express her sentiments any further on a subject on which she was aware she had already said too much; particularly as there certainly had been some cause of complaint on the part of the lovely widow, whose sensations for the last ten minutes had been rendered extremely unpleasant by the controversy between the youthful Emmeline and the fashionable Baronet, whom she was by no means ambitious of obtaining as a cham-

pion. Nor was the silence of the talkative Lady Sophia on the present matter of debate less extraordinary than the extreme warmth of the younger sister, in the sentiments she had expressed on the conduct of the Marquis of Rosalvie. Flora had not been accustomed to hear young women talk so freely of young men; and she could not help thinking that it was a feature of indiscretion in the youthful Emmeline, which she herself should have discouraged had she been her mother, or even her eldest sister; but Lady Sophia had said nothing, but insidiously laughed at the warmth and impetuosity of Emmeline, which she ought to have corrected. But why correct her? What had the sweet girl done so grossly indiscreet that she should deserve correction, only for defending the character of an amiable man, who was so closely united in habits of friendship with her mother, and whose singularity of disposition she was so well acquainted with? And why should Flora feel angry with the pretty Emmeline, for the warmth she had so ingenuously discovered, and for extolling the merits of the absent young nobleman? Flora could not tell; but she blushed deeply that the conversation of the young Emmeline on the subject of the Marquis of Rosalvie, (with whom she appeared so decidedly a favourite,) had, on this very account, rendered the sweet girl less pleasing and interesting to her than before. Why it had done so, the perplexed Flora was at a loss to guess; and feeling sorry that she had spoken of the Marquis at all, she once more felt herself under the necessity of giving her hand to the fashionable Baronet, who conducted her to the rooms with the pride of a favoured and successful rival flushing his

cheek beyond his power of concealment: for he felt well assured, from the most fortunate coincidence of circumstances, that the lovely widow would, from this very evening, be given to him from the current report of fashionable rumour, and that the preference she had shewn him in retaining him for her partner, and rejecting all other overtures made for her hand, would at once give a colour to the report, and confirm the public opinion that he was viewed by this lovely creature with sentiments of a favourable nature, by which all other suitors would be kept in the back ground. This would be an advantage, of which he would avail himself by every means and art in his power; and though he certainly, at the present moment, had no reason to boast that he had obtained any conquest over the heart of the young and beautiful widow, yet his personal vanity was so great as to forbid him to despair; and with spirits almost approaching to intoxication, and with looks that bade defiance to the envious sneers of his disappointed rivals, he once more entered into the spirit of the lively dance with his bewitching partner.

But not so Flora. Something had clouded her brilliant vivacity, and rendered her less sensible of the pleasures of her most favourite amusement. She danced indeed as gracefully and as elegantly as before; but the same buoyancy of spirit did not seem to animate her soul, nor did the same brilliancy illumine her lovely eyes. Her complexion too glowed not with such fresh bloom; and though assailed on every side with the incense offered at the shrine of beauty, by a thousand fashionable butterflies, she listened with apparent apathy to all of them; and to Sir Charles, her so highly

honoured and successful partner, she did not seem to listen at all. In short, Flora, for some cause or other, felt fatigued, and rejoiced when an opportunity occurred for again being seated in the adjoining chamber, to which Sir Charles had conducted her for refreshments, where she was presently joined by Lady Sophia and the Countess of Stormond herself.

"My dear creature, I have been most anxious to obtain a sight of you these three hours and a half," exclaimed her Ladyship; "but positively my guests have this evening been so extremely numerous, that I have had no opportunity till the present moment of stealing towards you."

During this speech the Countess had seated herself beside Flora, Lady Sophia took the vacant seat on the opposite side, and Sir Charles was gone in search of some refreshments to recruit the spirits of his lovely partner; for such had been the influx of company to this fashionable party, that many who had not been invited on the occasion had actually made their appearance at Stormond Lodge; and such was the well known urbanity of manners and liberality of disposition in the amiable Countess, that it was very unlikely that when they did come she should give them an unwelcome reception, or that the doors of hospitality should be closed against them after they had once entered, although some of the intruders were not altogether congenial to her taste or her feelings.

Now whether Lady Sophia had held any conversation with her mother on the subject of the Marquis of Rosalvie, previous to the Countess seeing Flora, or whether the cloud which obscured the countenance of

the lovely widow was still so perceptible as to attract the observation of Lady Stormond towards her, we know not; but it is certain that her Ladyship, after being a few minutes seated at the side of Flora, most anxiously enquired how she had been entertained with the amusements of the evening, how she liked the dancing, and the several personages to whom she had been introduced in the ball-rooms? To all of which enquiries Flora gave the most proper and consistent replies; adding, that her engaging herself to Sir Charles Ratcliff, by the merest accident imaginable, had prevented her from availing herself of the honour which had been intended her by several distinguished personages, who had solicited to dance with her; among whom were Lord Clairville and the Honourable Captain Ponsonby, whom she regretted she had been compelled to refuse.

"Well, my love," cried the Countess, smiling at the earnestness with which Flora had addressed this speech to her, "I have no doubt of the mortification and disappointment which both these gentlemen received, and of your wish to have obliged them all with your fair hand; but as that lucky devil Sir Charles was so fortunate as to succeed first in obtaining so enviable a distinction, they must e'en content themselves with the fortunes of war, and try the fates another time, when you shall again honour these rooms with your charming presence; but, my love, for Heaven's sake instantly take some refreshment. I protest you appear perfectly fatigued with the exertion of dancing, and yet they tell me your very soul is in it, and that you dance most exquisitely. Rosalvie is quite enchanted with your performance of the quadrilles."

Lady Sophia was at this moment engaged in some trifling conversation with one of the fashionable visitants, or the surprise and astonishment, not indeed unmixed with some degree of pleasure, which was now exhibited on Flora's blushing cheek, would instantly have been betrayed to the keen raillery of her Ladyship's observation; but the Countess was an entire stranger to what had passed respecting the Marquis in the early part of the evening, or she affected to be so, as also to the deep embarrassment of the blushing Flora, as she timidly enquired if there were more personages than one of the name of Rosalvie, who had visited the rooms that evening.

To which her Ladyship, apparently not regarding her confusion, instantly replied—

"No, my love, no other than he to whom I introduced you when you were sitting with the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, and she is aunt to the Marquis of Rosalvie. I called him Rosalvie indeed, because I am accustomed to address him only by that familiar title, from the long years of friendship and confidence with which I have been honoured by his amiable aunt, who was a distant relative of my late beloved lord. But you have not been addressed by any other personage of the name of Rosalvie, except the Marquis, have you, Lady Primrose?"

Flora coloured deeply, while replying—

"No, your Ladyship, and certainly not by the Marquis himself, that I can recollect. I have seen him twice in the ball-room in the course of the evening, but neither of which times did I hear a sentence escape from his lips."

The Countess smiled; and after a moment's interval of silence, exclaimed—

"That is nothing strange with Ormond Rosalvie, my love; and it is probable that if you were to be here for a whole month, you would not hear him exchange a syllable with any strangers. He is actually one of the most eccentric beings in the creation; yet his singularity, as some suppose it, is not affected, but the effect of a domestic misfortune which he sustained in early life, which years of long suffering and heart-rending anguish have not yet effaced from his memory, and which, I fear, yet rankles in his heart. It has clouded his spirits, once so brilliant and animated, soured his temper, and perhaps tended much to change the kind and liberal sentiments he once cherished of mankind. He has been treacherously deceived, and his generous, easy, and unsuspecting confidence cruelly betrayed, by a perfidious female, whom he once passionately adored. He is therefore somewhat prejudiced against the sex, my dear Lady Primrose, fearing that in every angel form, in every angel face, he should again behold the counterpart of his faithless Isadora. But this secret is not generally known: the domestic misfortune which so heavily assailed him, happened in a distant country; few therefore are acquainted with the sorrows which so early blighted the promise of youth, talent, and every charm which could enliven virtue in the form of manhood. Yet, returned to his native land, and in the bosom of his own family, we cherish the hope that peace may again revisit his so long tortured breast. Since his abode with his amiable aunt, his health is evidently

mended, and his mind more tranquillized; though the singular habits in which he has so much indulged when abroad, will, I am apprehensive, continue fixed and unalterable, unless some lovely woman shall fortunately transform him. We women deal in magic, you know, my dear Lady Primrose, and it will be lucky for poor Rosalvie, should he find its power efficacious, when all other remedies have failed."

The brightness of Flora's complexion had very perceptibly undergone a change during Lady Stormond's recital of the sorrows of this unfortunate young nobleman, for whose restoration to peace of mind she felt more solicitous than she had the courage to express; nor could she now wonder at the gentle Emmeline being so anxious to vindicate his cause, since she was no stranger to his misfortunes. It was compassion then only for the sufferings of an amiable being, which had induced the lovely girl to become so warm an advocate in his favour; and the pretty Emmeline was again the favourite, which she at first was, with Flora, for her compassion for the unhappy Marquis of Rosalvie.

But did not Lady Sophia know also of the misfortunes of this amiable young nobleman? Certainly she could be no stranger, more than her young sister, to the domestic calamity he had sustained. Yet Lady Sophia had uttered nothing in his praise, like the gentle Emmeline; nay, Lady Sophia had actually attempted to turn the character of the Marquis into ridicule, and to make him a laughing-stock for her and Sir Charles. Unkind, cruel girl!—were the sorrows of the wretched and the unfortunate a proper subject for derision? Flora revolted at the idea of the con-

temptuous laugh and the unmeaning jest which her Ladyship had so unfeelingly betrayed.

While these subjects had unconsciously filled her mind, neither the approach of Sir Charles, or the glass of lemonade which he so gallantly presented to her, were noticed by Flora, till Lady Stormond exclaimed, "My dear Lady Primrose, here is poor Sir Charles dying with impatience to know how he has been so unfortunate as to incur your Ladyship's displeasure."

"By all that is beautiful, but you must forgive me, divine creature, for staying so long on my mission," uttered the fashionable baronet, in a tone of the most impassioned expression; "but while they were making the lemonade, the Duchess of Pemberton called me aside to inquire after the health of my lovely bewitching partner; and the Marquis of Rosalvie and Lady Emmeline, who had joined us, would not let me go till I had resolved a certain question, and that was——"

"Immaterial, if it at all concerned me, Sir Charles," cried Flora, with a look which completely awed and silenced the bold familiar advances of this presuming coxcomb, whose freedom of thus publicly laying claim to her conversation and attention, merely because he had obtained her for a partner in the dance, she was determined to check at once, that he might no longer press his assiduities towards her, or further encroach upon the indulgence she had through necessity been obliged to grant him. For a moment, the fashionable baronet was completely abashed and mortified, while, to increase his vexation, Lady Sophia, who had heard the rebuff given him by Flora, indulged in fits of the most immoderate laughter. None but the Countess

seemed to pity his chagrin; but as her guest, she could not with propriety join in the laugh against him, and entered into some trifling chat with the crest-fallen hero. The departure of some of her fashionable visitors made it necessary for her to appear among them; and it was not till the Countess had quitted her seat that Flora missed a little cornelian amulet, in the shape of a heart, which had been affixed to her diamond necklace. Of all the ornaments she possessed, she prized this little amulet, as being the gift of Lord Primrose, before he had married her. How she had lost it she could not tell, unless in the hurry of dancing it had got loosened from the necklace, and fallen on the ground, where it was probable that it was trampled to pieces; and she expressed her regret, not only to Lady Sophia, who had taken her mother's seat beside of her, but to Sir Charles, who protested that he would not leave the room till the precious heart was restored to the bosom of its lovely owner.

"And do you imagine that any one will restore it, when once they know that it has adorned the bosom of Lady Primrose?", said Lady Sophia, with an arch look; "I protest it is a temptation so great, that I should wonder, if found by any of the males, if ever they return it. The heart of Lady Primrose is too valuable to be so easily relinquished, when *once secured.*"

Flora made no reply to so direct and fulsome a compliment, uttered with too much paint to be ingenuous or sincere: in short, the more she beheld of this truly modern and fashionable young lady, the less she admired her; while every moment increased her

esteem, and approbation for her charming mother, and the gentle unassuming Emmeline. But probably her spirited defence of the character of the unfortunate Rosalvie had in no small degree contributed to heighten this lovely girl in the favourable predilection she had conceived towards her. Meanwhile Sir Charles Ratcliff had absolutely flown over all the rooms in search of the lost heart, but with little success, for no one had seen it but on the bosom of its lovely mistress; and he expressed the utmost regret and disappointment that he could gain no intelligence of the precious bauble so dearly prized by the most lovely being in creation, and to whom he felt he must be under the necessity of returning without giving her the slightest hope of its being restored to her. He exclaimed to the Countess, to whom he was uttering his complaints, and who was really sorry that such an accident should have occurred at Stormond lodge, or occasioned the least uneasiness to her lovely guest—

"By all that's beautiful, my Lady, I would give half my estate to purchase just such another, merely to have the pleasure of being thanked from the lips of so divine a creature!"

These words were said in the hearing of the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, and the Marquis of Rosalvie, from the former of whom it produced a grave laugh, and from the latter a look of contemptuous silence. At length the dowager exclaimed—

"And so you would really make so great a sacrifice only to be rewarded by a pretty woman, Sir Charles?

"Yes, your Grace, for such a woman as Lady Primrose, I should consider no sacrifice of human effort too

great," replied the fashionable young baronet, wishing to have it immediately inferred that he was inspired with a violent and most disinterested passion for the lovely widow. To which the dowager tartly replied—

"Most gallant, Sir Charles! and yet not perfectly disinterested, after all, because it is well known that Lady Primrose is also immensely rich, exclusive of the very great share of personal attractions with which I own Nature has very liberally gifted her. She is certainly worth any man's pains; and, with a fortune of nearly three hundred thousand pounds, the widow need not be called three times in the parish church, in order to get her a husband."

The Countess laughed, and so did the pretty Emmeline, while the young baronet exhibited a confusion which not all his impudence could conceal; but, wishing to escape from the keen observations of the venerable lady, he slided into the adjoining apartment, to renew his hopeless search after the lost, stolen, or strayed heart, and was absent at the very moment when the carriage of Lady Primrose was announced to be in readiness to convey her Ladyship to Stanmore Priory.

CHAPTER IX.

Ten thousand echoes through the lightsome plains
Repeat the clear, the sweet melodious strains;
The fields rejoice, the fragrant groves around
Blossom afresh at their enchanting sound:
The heaven of heavens, from dazzling heights above,
Returns the name, and hails the power of love!

SUCH was the influx of carriages that surrounded the entrance of Stormond Lodge at the hour of departure of some of the most splendid and fashionable guests, that nearly an hour had elapsed before that of Lady Primrose could draw up to the gates. Meanwhile Flora was not only obliged to endure the continued and obtrusive attentions of Sir Charles Ratcliff, who had again stationed himself at her side, but she was compelled to accept of the assiduites also of a number of fashionable beaux besides, who, with eager curiosity to obtain a sight of the enchaning object who had inspired such general admiration, all flocked around her the very moment they perceived that the rooms were beginning to be cleared of the innumerable guests which had crouded them almost to suffocation. Among

the number of the still remaining personages were the Earl of Clairville, and the Honourable Captain Ponsonby. Lady Sophia was still conversing with Flora at the moment of their approach; and it was evidently perceptible that the expression with which the features and countenance of Lady Sophia were illumined, was not that of the most pleasing or flattering kind, when she beheld the eyes of the latter gentleman straying towards the young and beautiful widow. She pettishly exclaimed, as the Captain made particular inquiries of Flora how she felt after the exertions in which she had been so delightfully engaged—

"Lord, Ponsonby, how teazing you are. This is the third time, I protest, that you have asked Lady Primrose the same question, whether she is fatigued with dancing, as if you could not make use of your eyes, not only to her Ladyship, but to all of us. We are all fatigued and weary, you may very naturally suppose, after so much exercise, and such excessively heated and crowded rooms. So many strangers, too, that mamma actually never invited here, and yet was obliged to appear monstrous glad to see them all, though we should have liked their absence far better than their company."

"Oh you beautiful severe one," uttered the son of Mars, instantly withdraving his eyes from the universal object of attraction, and stealing to the side of the half-offended fair mistress of his idolatry.—Captain Ponsonby was a professed admirer of Lady Sophia; and it is certain that this fashionable young lady by no means disregarded the passion, or rather the sentiment of honourable affection with which she had inspired

him. There were other reasons also, more potent, for encouraging the addresses of such a man as Captain Ponsonby. He was the son of an earl, and though a younger one, would in time inherit the title of his brother, and a considerable property, part of which he at present enjoyed. He was a fine, spirited, and exceedingly handsome young fellow, too, in addition to all these advantages, and was not to be thrown away, when once secured in Cupid's fetters; at least so Lady Sophia thought, and so Lady Sophia looked, when she beheld the eyes of her gallant admirer so intently gazing on an object, whose uncommon personal loveliness she felt inclined more than once to envy since she had made her appearance at Stormond Lodge, and for whose speedy departure she was devoutly and fervently praying, when her Ladyship's carriage was announced. Lady Sophia was longing for her exit when she perceived the approach of the herald, (which was her sister Emmeline,) to inform her of the joyful news, which was scarcely told before the aforesaid gentlemen drew nigh. The speech of Lady Sophia had certainly excited some degree of risibility among them all; and Sir Charles exclaimed, laughing—

"Pon honour, I am extremely happy then, Lady Sophia, that I did not make my appearance at Stormond Lodge this evening in the character of an uninvited guest, or I should have unfortunately been one of those whose absence would have been more agreeable than their company."

"And I too, probably, in that case," cried Lord Clairville.

"And I too, as probably," exclaimed Captain Pon-

sonby, stealing a look at this moment towards his lovely enslaver, which, whether intelligible to her or not, we cannot possibly tell; but the cheeks of Lady Sophia were instantly overspread with blushes of the brightest vermillion; and she was glad of any pretext to make her escape, to avoid the spirited raillery of Lord Clairville, who replied to the sly glance of his friend, which had been directed to her Ladyship—

"Why no, I think not, Ponsonby; *you* would have been an exception; whether an invited, or an uninvited guest, I do not imagine that the gates of Stormond Lodge would have shut *you* out from its hospitable mansion. There is one lovely being within it, whose heart would surely have given you admission there. What says Lady Sophia to the truth of this observation?"

"Oh, I protest I have not time at this precise moment to satisfy your Lordship's inquiry," uttered her Ladyship, in the utmost confusion; and then turning to Lady Primrose, she whispered—

"My dear Lady Primrose, I see you are quite anxious to retire; suppose I go and tell mamma that you are waiting for your carriage to draw up to the door; suppose we steal away from these idle chatterers, and get into the adjoining apartment. Emmeline, I wish you would go and seek mamma, and tell her that Lady Primrose is waiting for her carriage. Run, Emmeline—fly—don't stay a moment. In the mean time your Ladyship and I will run away from these men."

All this had been uttered in a breath by Lady Sophia, and met with no dissenting voice from Flora, who cer-

tainly was not only most anxious to return home, but excessively fatigued and weary, even of the splendour and gaiety of the festive scenes which had surrounded her. Besides, she wished to get rid of the assiduities of Sir Charles Ratcliff, which he had presumed so particularly to address her with; for she neither liked the looks, the manner, nor the conversation of the familiar and conceited young baronet. In short, Flora had completely exhausted her spirits, or, somehow or other, her spirits had completely exhausted her. She thought of her dear, fond, affectionate, old nunkey, by way of affording her some relief; and how delighted he would be to see her return, and to hear her recount the gay scenes she had just witnessed. Well, but the General would expect her to give him some description of the fashionable personages she had mixed with at the Countess of Stormond's; and she must say something of the males as well as the females. About the former, it was most probable that her uncle would be more particular. Well, what could she say? Of Sir Charles Ratcliff, nothing: although he had been her partner in the dance, yet she did not like him, and so she would tell the General. Then there was Lord Clairville, and the Honourable Captain Ponsonby, both elegant, and infinitely superior to the young baronet, certainly; still Flora had seen but little of them, and conversed with them still less. Of these gentlemen, therefore, she was not likely to give a very animated description. Then there was the Marquis of Rosalvie! What could she say of *him*? He had said nothing to her; but she had heard something of him, and that something had interested her in his behalf.

The Countess had not forbade her to relate the misfortunes of the unhappy nobleman to those who would sympathize with them: but what right had she to betray the secret of the malady which so deeply preyed on the spirits of this amiable personage; for Lady Stormond had assured her that he was really amiable when intimately known. What were his domestic and private sorrows to her uncle, who had never beheld him? What were they to her? This was a question Flora could not resolve, for the life of her: the deep mantling blush of crimson which suddenly mounted to her fair cheek and bosom, and the soft gentle sigh of sympathy which involuntarily escaped from it, (but how she did not know,) slyly insinuated that the misfortunes of Rosalvie were not a subject of indifference to her; but she was far from wishing any one to surmise that but herself, as she actually could not trace the source, at this precise moment, from whence this deep sympathy for an almost entire stranger proceeded; and she very prudently resolved to let the name of the Marquis alone, and not to mention either him or his misfortunes to her uncle.

These were the reflections which occupied the mind of Flora when she retired with Lady Sophia and the pretty Emmeline into the adjoining chamber, where Flora, now cloaked and muffled up, waited only for the arrival of the Countess, to bid her farewell.

"I will now go and tell mamma that you are going to leave us, dear Lady Primrose," cried Emmeline; "I left her talking with the Duchess of Pemberton and the Marquis of Rosalvie about the loss of your pretty little heart; and Rosalvie smiled, and said he hoped that it would be the greatest misfortune you would ever

sustain ! But indeed, indeed he was not jesting, for he sighed deeply after this remark."

" Did he, Lady Emmeline ?" exclaimed Flora ; " the wish was kind, and I thank him for it : as to the bauble, the loss of it was nothing, and I valued it only as the gift of Lord Primrose."

This was not said by Flora without colouring so deeply as to draw on her the observation of Lady Sophia ; but, for once, this fashionable young lady did not indulge in her favourite propensity to raillery, because she found that the lovely widow did not perfectly relish it : besides, she was just going away, and she did not wish Flora to carry an impression with her unfavourable to her character, or that should lead her to conjecture that she considered her in the slightest degree an object of envy or jealousy. Smiling, therefore, with the most insinuating softness and complacency, she thanked Flora for the cordial and polite invitation she had given both to Lady Emmeline and herself to visit Stanmore Priory ; and taking the lovely hand which was extended towards her, with the most affable sweetness she exclaimed—

" You cannot doubt of the inclination which both Emmeline and I feel to cultivate your friendship, dear Lady Primrose, and how eagerly we shall avail ourselves of the kind invitation you have given us to visit the Priory ; but remember, I shall bring no intruders along with me, positively not one male creature, to torment you ; unless particularly invited by your Ladyship, I will prohibit their approaching you : if they wish to enlist under my banners, they shall carry no false colours, I promise you."

Flora made no reply to a speech uttered with more spirit, or rather asperity, than she thought occasion warranted; but merely observed, with an air of carelessness, that she neither had, or wished to be troubled with male intruders, nor ever intended to invite any to the Priory, except her most confidential friends, or those only that her uncle, General Oldstock, approved of. The astonishment of Lady Sophia was extreme, though it was evident that this sudden intelligence was, at the same instant, highly gratifying to her feelings.

"Your Uncle, General Oldstock?" exclaimed she; "why, good heavens, Lady Primrose, is your uncle still living, and does he now reside with you at the Priory?"

"He is at present there," replied Flora, "and I hope he will long continue to be my guest. Rumour had indeed reported my uncle as dead, and my father, Sir Oliver, believed him to be so; judge then, Lady Sophia, of my surprise, when my so greatly revered and highly respected relative only a day since presented himself to my transported sight, after an absence of ten years from his native land! Judge of my emotions, and the tumultuous tide of joy that overwhelmed my heart in again acknowledging my dear and affectionate relative by the tenderest ties of affection. When he pressed me to his gallant breast, after the dearly-purchased laurels he has gained in defence of his sovereign and his country, I gloried in being the niece of a veteran soldier, returned from the hardships of a long campaign, to enjoy the calm blessings of peace in the bosom of his friends, his home, and his country."

Flora had not uttered this without emotion, and every lovely feature was animated with this faithful portraiture given of her beloved uncle; and perhaps she never looked so enchantingly lovely as at the very moment that the Countess of Stormond, the Duchess of Pemberton, and the Marquis of Rosalvie, (on whose arm the pretty Emmeline was leaning with the most sisterly affection,) approached her.

"My dear creature, pray pardon my seeming inattention in thus neglecting you," cried the Countess; "but, thank heaven, I have got through the fatiguing drudgery of bidding good night to all my fashionable guests. They are all gone, praise the Fates; and those that remain are among the number only of my most approved favourites and friends, in which, believe me, Lady Primrose is not the least. But, my sweet love, how came you to lose your heart? Have you no recollection when you had it in your possession last?"

To which Flora, deeply blushing, (for, somehow or other, the eyes of the Marquis had unconsciously strayed towards her when the Countess made this curious inquiry,) replied—

"No indeed, your Ladyship, it would puzzle me to know at what moment the truant escaped me; I am only conscious of its loss, and of the value I now set upon it, as being the gift of my late husband."

The venerable Duchess smiled, and casting a look of ineffable complacency on the young widow, exclaimed—

"My love, we do not know the value of the most trifling objects till we find that they are irrecoverably lost to us; how greatly then must we deplore the loss

of those of whose intrinsic worth we were always sensible.!"

"Your Grace's remark is incontestibly true," cried Flora, with a gentle sigh. During these observations the impatient Sophia had called her mother aside, and revealed all the communication she had received from Flora respecting the arrival of General Oldstock, which so exceedingly surprized her Ladyship, that it was some moments before she could recover from the astonishment into which the unexpected intelligence had thrown her; but when she did, she gently taxed Flora with unkindness for not bringing her uncle with her to Stormond Lodge.

"Surely, surely, General Oldstock would have been most cordially and rapturously received and welcomed among the number of most revered and honoured guests," cried her Ladyship. "Unkind Lady Primrose, not to inform us sooner of his arrival at the Priory. I would have flown on the very instant to entreat his presence here; for he knew my dear Lord, and I am no stranger to the kindness he evinced towards a dear departed object, over whose untimely fate memory must still mourn with fond regret, with fond affection. It was your uncle, Lady Primrose, that received the parting breath of an adored son; and could he want to be told that he would find a welcome here? Oh no! he must have known the family of Lord Stormond better than to doubt of their gratitude, of their reverence towards the friend, the kind consoler of their wounded and expiring brother!"

The agitation of the amiable Countess in reverting to her son was portrayed in every feature, and excited

the tenderest sympathy and deepest concern of her surrounding friends; while Emmeline, who had seated herself beside Flora, turned pale and trembled at the mention of her brother. Flora, greatly concerned that so melancholy a subject should have been started, regretted that Lady Sophia should so precipitately have informed the Countess of her uncle's return to England; to which, however, the Marquis had seemed to listen with no inconsiderable interest: though he suffered no sentence to escape him, yet Flora imagined that his looks were directed with a less degree of severity towards her; and saying all that she could utter of the tenderest sympathy to the amiable Countess, whose agitated spirits were greatly relieved by the consoling efforts of the venerable Duchess of Pemberton, she arose to take her leave, and to repeat in a whisper to Lady Stormond her earnest hope that she should shortly be favoured with her company, and that also of the young Ladies, at Stanmore Priory. She then curtseyed her most respectful adieus to the Duchess, and the Marquis of Rosalvie, who bowed gracefully to her salutation, while the Duchess jocosely exclaimed to her thoughtful and abstracted nephew—

"Why, Ormond, you are surely not going to suffer Lady Primrose to conduct herself down stairs to her carriage, or be handed into it by her servants!"

The Marquis was now compelled to make a move; he arose instantly from his chair, while the blushing Flora, in the most perceptible confusion, entreated that his Lordship would by no means incommode himself on her account.

"Nonsense, child," cried the venerable Lady, "it

would be highly ridiculous if you were to be seen going unattended to your carriage, and equally absurd of my nephew to permit you to do so, while he is seen sitting here: so give him your hand, child; he won't bite you, though I own he is somewhat of a ferocious animal."

"My good aunt has given you a delectable character of me, Lady Primrose," cried the Marquis, with a smile, which was the only one that had animated his fine and intelligent features during the whole of the evening; and approaching Flora with an air of the most easy and polished elegance, he added with peculiar softness, "but if, after this report, you feel inclined to accept of my poor services, I will most readily conduct you in perfect safety to your carriage."

The lovely and certainly not reluctant hand of Flora was now resigned to the care of the Marquis; but she blushed so deeply in again repeating her adieus, while the old Duchess nodded so sagaciously to her nephew, that Lady Sophia with the utmost difficulty returned Flora's good night without bursting into the most immoderate peal of laughter; which was not a little increased by Sir Charles Ratcliff and Lord Clairville coming into the room at the same moment, the former of whom declared that he hoped he was just in time to attend that paragon of beauty, the divine Lady Primrose, to her carriage; that he believed Ponsonby and Clairville had kept him in conversation on purpose to deprive him of that superlative felicity.

"Very likely," cried the Duchess, laughing, "and if they had any such intention, they have certainly succeeded in the accomplishment of their wishes, for you

are just arrived too late, Sir Charles, to obtain that distinguished post of being escort to Lady Primrose; she has this moment been conducted to her carriage under the wing of a protector, who, though not quite so gallant as you, knows how to appreciate the value of his charge."

"Indeed!" cried the now greatly disappointed and chagrined baronet, "and pray may I inquire who that is, your Grace?"

"My nephew," answered the venerable lady, with a conscious air of triumph.

"The Marquis of Rosalvie!" repeated the crest-fallen hero, "that is superlatively strange and whimsical of his Lordship, 'pon honour;" and the fashionable baronet perfectly bit his lip with vexation, while all the rest of the party, save the Duchess, (for Captain Ponsonby had now joined them,) were almost convulsed with laughter.

"Superlatively strange and whimsical?" repeated her Grace, indignantly, "I should be excessively glad to know, Sir Charles, why you are pleased to apply these terms to my nephew, which appear to me not only strange, but perfectly enigmatical. Explain why conducting a lady to her carriage is any more strange and whimsical in the Marquis of Rosalvie than in Sir Charles Ratcliff, or any of the gentlemen here present. If you can explain this, Sir Charles, I shall feel obliged to you."

But the baronet could not explain it; and though vexed and mortified at the disappointment he had sustained, yet he had the prudence, or rather the policy, to say nothing to offend the Duchess of Pemberton,

who was always more than a match for him on every occasion where the exercise of wit or superior intellect were concerned; assuming an air, therefore, of the utmost indifference, he replied to her Grace in the following manner, though colouring deeply all the while with suppressed anger—

"Why really, your Grace, I do not see, with deference to your superior judgment,"—and the baronet bowed with affected humility, wishing the venerable lady at the very extremity of the bottom of a duck pond, for having urged him to make a confession every way so repellent to the present nature of his feelings,—"that any explanation is necessary of a plain matter of fact business, which was obvious to every person in the room, besides myself, that the Marquis neither danced nor conversed with Lady Primrose, which every body else was proud and solicitous of doing the very moment she made her appearance in the room; but he appeared particularly solicitous to avoid her: therefore your Grace, I say, it was a little strange and whimsical in his Lordship so to do, when every body else was dying to obtain a sight of so divine and lovely a creature; and—and—and—now I presume I have explained myself entirely to your Grace's satisfaction."

"Entirely to your own, I conceive, Sir Charles," answered the Duchess, surveying the young baronet with a look of the most superlative contempt, "but I judge it will be some time ere you can contrive to do it to the satisfaction of any other person: but don't alarm yourself in the supposition that your observations on the conduct of my nephew have in any degree offended me. Lord love you, I am wiser, young man;

than to let *your* remarks ruffle my temper; they resemble chaff before the wind, and are blown away in an instant."

"Parry that, if you can, baronet," cried the incorrigible and incessant tormentor of poor Sir Charles, which was Ponsonby, who stood at his elbow, heartily enjoying the amusing controversy between the young Narcissus and the old Duchess.

"Now I would advise you to parry off," uttered Lord Clairville, in a low whisper, "or the old lady will attack you presently when Rosalvie returns, and the consequences may then be dangerous, you know, baronet. Every body knows that the Marquis is a duelist; and if this pretty widow once gets into his head, and finds the way to his heart, he may chance to have a pop or two at yours, my fine fellow."

The pretty baronet looked perfectly frightened, and in the same under tone in which this conversation had been carried on between the three gentlemen, exclaimed—

"Will he? Curse me if he shall though; I have no particular fancy for fighting; and though I love the divine widow, I protest I would not contend for the fair prize with such a man as the Marquis: he is a desperate fellow, and who knows what he would be if he was to fall desperately in love with her?"

"A tiger let loose from the American wilds," uttered Ponsonby.

"An Arabian wolf," responded Lord Clairville, winking at his friend.

"A hungry lion darting on his prey," repeated Ponsonby, laughing.

"A fierce crocodile just imported from the Nile," reiterated Lord Clairville, at the very moment that the Marquis of Rosalvie again made his entrance into the room, which was the signal for the speedy exit of Sir Charles Ratcliff. He started up, looked at his watch, protested that he did not know that the hour was so prodigiously late, and making a gallant bow to the lady of the mansion, finally retreated in his gay equipage, which had long been waiting for his departure from Stormond Lodge, determined that he would not visit it again till he should hear whether the Marquis was or was not in love with the young widow.

No comment was publicly made on the sudden departure of the fashionable baronet, for none wished him to remain beyond the hour that the other visitants had departed; and Lady Sophia had wished him gone much sooner, for he had totally prevented the possibility of Captain Ponsonby entering into any private chat with her the whole time he was there, because, in conjunction with his friend, Lord Clairville, the Captain had agreed to become the tormentor of the young baronet the whole of the evening. They could not indeed so openly attack him during the time that he was engaged in dancing with his lovely partner, but the very moment he quitted her side, they commenced their operations, and fairly frightened him out of the field of supposed victory over the heart of the young and beautiful widow. Ponsonby, however, did not quit Stormond Lodge without contriving to whisper some soft speeches in the ear of his fair mistress, which made her perfectly satisfied that she had encountered no very powerful rival in the charms of Lady Prim-

rose; and when she retired with her sister to the arms of Morpheus, she fell into golden dreams of happiness, which she hoped would shortly be realized with love and Ponsonby: but the dreams of Emmeline were innocence and peace, pure as the breath of angels; she had not a wish, she had not a thought that strayed beyond the boundaries of a mother's fond affection.

But pray what were the dreams of the Marquis of Rosalvie, who had retired too with his amiable aunt from the hospitable mansion of their beloved friend? and what were those of the young widow, when she also quitted Stormond Lodge? Very natural inquiries, certainly, gentle reader, but positively I cannot tell you at the present moment, because I am not permitted to remove the mystic veil that conceals the hearts of these two personages from the prying eye of curiosity, till time shall elucidate further mysteries which are still suspending over their destiny. I will only tell you in what manner Flora was conducted from the drawing room of the Countess of Stormond to her own carriage by the Marquis of Rosalvie, and how he behaved to his lovely charge as they walked along the gallery which led to the grand entrance of the winding staircase. Flora had eyes, (and they were beautiful ones,) so had the Marquis, equally brilliant and expressive as hers; but it appeared that neither chose to make use of them, as they proceeded arm in arm together along the vaulted gallery; for Flora's bright eyes were certainly cast down in timid confusion, and the eyes of the Marquis were as certainly fixed on any thing else but Flora, for they were perfectly averted from her till at the very precise moment that she was just going to step

into the carriage, when Flora, curtseying gracefully, bade his Lordship a good night, "or rather good morning, my Lord,"—added Flora, with a sort of playful smile, which, most unfortunately for the stoic Marquis, discovered that lovely dimple at the corner of a pretty mouth, which the General had so often lavished his praises on to Ensign Conway—"for the bright shining firmament is already shedding on us its golden rays." Now whether it was the melodious voice of Flora, which was melody itself, or whether the pretty dimple attracted his Lordship's particular attention, I am sure I cannot positively decide; (for male beings are strange inconsistent animals, and you might as well explore the Cretan labyrinth as to define the nature of their sudden caprices;) but something now irresistibly impelled the Marquis to look at Flora as she was just about to spring into the carriage. His Lordship had better have turned his eyes away, and so avoided the danger of temptation, for there he beheld a pretty little foot, and one of the neatest ancles in the world. So much, my Lord, for your curiosity. Had Eve been more wise, she would never have tasted of the apple. And his Lordship lingered for a moment before Flora had finally seated herself in the carriage. At length he exclaimed, while he placed his hand on one of the blinds of the carriage, half drawn up—

"I would recommend you, Lady Primrose, to draw up both the blinds as you journey to the Priory; it may prevent the effects of your catching cold, after the exeessive heat to which you have been exposed during the whole of the evening."

"I thank your Lordship for the caution," cried

Flora, deeply blushing, and drawing up the blind on the opposite side, "for I should certainly have neglected it, if you had not so very kindly reminded me of it."

A pause ensued, not much to the satisfaction of her Ladyship's coachman, who thought he had waited long enough, and felt impatient for the order to drive off. Still the Marquis of Rosalvie, for some unaccountable whim or other, lingered at the door of the carriage, which still remained open; nor was Flora in a very great hurry to tell him to shut it. It was a somewhat singular situation, however, for his Lordship to continue in long, and the impropriety of it immediately appeared to strike him, for in a hurried accent he pronounced—

"I have a most treacherous memory, Lady Primrose, among the catalogue of my faults, and I beseech you to pardon the omission I have been guilty of: you lost a heart in the ball room, which I was so fortunate as to find lying on the floor; permit me to restore to you what you so justly and deservedly prized as the gift of your late worthy and excellent husband, Lord Primrose."

The Marquis at the same instant presented the little cornelian amulet to the astonished and confounded Flora, and, bowing respectfully, bid the coachman drive on, and hastily withdrew, leaving the lovely widow in a flutter of spirits, and with sensations which were indescribable, but certainly by no means painful.

It is said there are moments in which we live ages: like the colours of a beauteous rainbow, they are too lovely to endure a long existence in frail mortality;

like the dews of heaven, that gently fall on leaves of roses, they are too exquisitely pure to be lasting. Such were the sensations of poor Flora at the moment that the Marquis of Rosalvie presented the little amulet to her trembling hand; and what would Flora not have lost, to have had it so restored? I do not know—but you may guess. One little moment had changed all her resolutions, all her intentions of not mentioning the misfortunes of the Marquis of Rosalvie to her uncle. Could she speak of a more amiable being than he apparently now seemed, when divested of that gloomy frowning aspect which had clouded his fine intelligent and expressive features in the ball room? Even his singularity of manner possessed a grace in him, which in another would have been repellent. He spake but little, it is true, but that little he had addressed to her was kind, was so rational, was so different to every body else. In short, Flora saw so much to admire in the Marquis of Rosalvie, and so little to disapprove, that the carriage had nearly arrived at the gates of Stanmore Priory before she awoke from her delightful reveries, when it was highly necessary that she should recover her wonted spirits and composure; not that she expected to see her uncle ere she had retired for a few hours to her chamber, (and she was well aware that he would not press her to rise early, after so much exertion and fatigue,) but she did not like to appear unusually fluttered even in the presence of her servants. They might think it strange; and strange enough it was to poor Flora, who had unconsciously admitted to her pure and artless bosom a stranger guest, which she could not so easily get rid

of. She knew not by what name to call the gentle, sly, but pleasing intruder; but she felt its impression beat tumultuously in her heart, and steal insensibly over her mind. The little amulet was cherished with greater care than ever—because what? Why because it was the gift of her late husband; what else could it be owing to, I wonder? And why should she feel her admiration of the Marquis of Rosalvie increase rather than diminish? Why, because he had spoken so highly of her dear departed Lord. Was not this enough to awaken her gratitude, and ground her sentiments of esteem, of friendship, of respect for the Marquis of Rosalvie? Certainly; for what can be more gratifying than to hear those spoken well of whom we love, or have loved, unless they have forfeited all claim to our affection, which had not been the case with Lord Primrose, in regard to the conduct he had invariably manifested towards his young and lovely wife: and Flora delighted to listen to the eulogium pronounced on his merits from the lips of the Marquis of Rosalvie, and so she would tell her uncle, that she would; she would tell him how highly the Marquis had spoken of Lord Primrose, and he would say that it was very natural for her in return to—to——Here poor Flora was certainly at a loss for a word, a single word, to express what sort of gratitude she ought to return to the Marquis of Rosalvie, for having spoken highly of her husband. But no matter, she would think of that some other time, and not puzzle herself at the present moment about a single word. Besides, it bewildered her, for she had been up nearly all night, and her head was not in its usual clear and quiet temperament. A few

hours of calm repose would set all to rights again, and both her heart and her head would be in their proper element.

So thought the young widow, when the carriage stopped at the gates of the Priory. The old grey-headed porter uncovered his head as it passed through the gates. It was detained a moment in the avenue by something that came in contact with one of the wheels; but the difficulty was soon obviated; the porter, who was called Robert, having lent his assistance to the footman, the impediment was quickly removed. In the mean time Flora had more than once looked out of the window, and perceiving the old porter to be standing without his hat, with the sweetest affability exclaimed—

"Pray, Robert, put on your hat; the morning air is damp, and you are not so young as you were twenty years ago. Robert, I beg that you will take better care of yourself."

"Heaven bless you, my dear honoured lady," uttered the old porter, with a respectful obedience, and instantly followed her Ladyship's injunctions, by replacing his hat on his head.

"Robert!" again repeated the smiling Flora.

"Yes, my Lady," answered he.

"I think whenever my Lord Primrose and I used to stay out late, (which seldom happened to be the case, by the bye,) that you were always indulged with a tankard of warm ale, with a toast in it. Do you remember, Robert?"

"My Lady, I have never forgotten my Lord's kindness to his old and faithful servant; and I shall never

forget yours, I am sure," replied the old man, tears starting to his eyes.

"Well then, having so good a memory," rejoined Flora, "suppose, Robert, you walk to the Priory, and tell the butler that your mistress desires he will set you down to a comfortable breakfast, and keep up the old charter of Lord Primrose, by not letting you depart without your tankard of warm ale, with a toast in it."

The carriage now passed on, and old Robert, yet hale and hearty, followed behind it with no small alacrity, brushing the morning dew off the lawn with his square-toed shoes, and hastily adjusting the silk handkerchief which was somewhat carelessly folded round his neck, in case he should happen to see Mrs. Spinster, the housekeeper. This done, he trotted away, but not without hoping that Heaven would shower down blessings on the beauteous head; and bestow bliss and joys unutterable on the warm and benevolent heart of her who had that morning manifested such exemplary kindness towards him.

CHAPTER X.

"Said I not, maiden mine, that I would swear
Before bright love, the God, to love thee long?
Oh yes! and to the world proclaim how fair,
How very fair thou art, even among
Beauties, who beautiful accounted are."

BARRY CORNWELL.

AS the midnight hour had progressively advanced, and Mrs. and Miss Evelyn had long departed from Stanmore Priory, where they had enjoyed a very comfortable and social chit chat in the company of General Oldstock and the young Ensign, (who was now some fathoms deep in love with the pretty Fanny,) the protracted absence of Lady Primrose had more than once produced a sort of irritable impatience on the natural urbanity of the General's temper; and when the large family clock, which was stationed at the entrance of the grand hall, responded the hour of four, it was a peal by no means welcome in the ears of the General, whose stock of patience, (with which he was not remarkably gifted,) was now completely exhausted: besides, he had set up considerably beyond his usual

hour, in the hopes of seeing his niece return home; and though the young soldier had exerted every faculty to please him, and an additional game at chess served to revive him for a little while longer, yet the timely monitor occasioned him to start with the most involuntary surprize, and hastily to rise from his chair with some small symptoms of displeasure manifested in his countenance, while he exclaimed—

"Why, gad zookers, Henry, it is past four o'clock, and Flora is not yet returned from Stormond Lodge. Curse me, if I had thought the little gipsey intended to stay out so late, I should have put on my nightcap some hours ago. Why the carriage has been gone from the Priory these two hours and a half, precisely, by my watch."

To which the young Ensign modestly replied—

"Very true, General; but then you must consider that"——

But here Henry was suddenly interrupted by the General vociferating, (and, to do him justice, in a true martial accent)—

"Zounds, I shall consider nothing but my niece's health. I say that these late hours are sufficient to injure the finest constitution in the world; and I shall lecture Flora prodigiously, when I see her, you may depend upon it, Henry; yes, gad zookers, I will be very severe with her."

"Doubtless, General," cried the Ensign, with an incredulous smile; "but when you see Lady Primrose return with renovated spirits, and looking as freshly and as sweetly as she did when she called for the arm of her dear uncle to assist her to the carriage; when

she expressed her deep regret that she could not prevail upon you to join the party at the Countess of Stormond's, where, though uninvited, she was certain of your being received as a most welcome guest; when she uttered all this, General, with one, I think, of the sweetest and most heavenly smiles imaginable, do you remember how conspicuous that favourite dimple was, that you so much admire, at the corner of her mouth?"

Instantaneous was the effect of this speech on the feelings of the General; and a smile, like a sunbeam breaking through a dark cloud, illumined the whole of his benevolent features.

"Do I remember it?" uttered he, "why, gad zookers, who is there that looks in the face of Flora when she is smiling that can ever forget it? Zounds! no, I have changed my mind about lecturing her when she comes home; I will leave that for her husband to do, if ever she makes a second choice, which, in all human probability, she will very shortly do, now she has got rid of her leading strings; and the sooner the better, I say; young and beautiful widows were never designed to wear the willow, merely because death is so uncivil as to deprive them of the joys of matrimony."

"And I have no doubt, General," answered Henry, "but the second choice that Lady Primrose makes will prove worthy of her election: her Ladyship is neither deficient in discernment, taste, or sensibility."

"No; she is a lovely creature, is she not, Henry?" cried the General, his eyes sparkling with animation as he spoke, "and is endowed with no small share of rationality, though she has so much vivacity and simplicity. Bless her, I would not utter an unkind word

to her for the created universe. I may bounce a little, to be sure, now she is absent; but if I was once to see her pop her pretty head in at that door, zounds! I should wish her a good morning, give her a hearty smack on her ruby lips, put my nightcap on, and march off to bed, which I intend doing in a few minutes, if Flora does not return. But I say, Henry, now we are talking of something pretty, what think you of Fanny Evelyn? She is well enough for a parson's daughter, is not she?"

With cheeks scarcely less florid than his scarlet coat, the young soldier, after some hesitation, pronounced—

"Miss Evelyn, General, is certainly a—a—a—young lady that"——

Henry now caught the eyes of the General fixed archly upon him, and, for the life of him, could not finish the sentence he had so awkwardly begun.

"Why, what the devil are you croaking for, Henry, as if you had got the mumps, and could not get your words out?" uttered the General, at the same instant that he was seized with a most immoderate fit of laughter. "Well, you have told me, Henry, that Miss Evelyn is a young lady, and that is all I am likely to get out of you. Gad zookers, I know that she is not an old one; I don't want you to give me that piece of information, for, as my sister Liddy says, I have ocular demonstration of the fact, without putting on a pair of spectacles to clear my eyesight."

The young Ensign now found that there was an absolute necessity for his saying something about Miss Evelyn, whether he liked it or not; and, unwilling that the General (who was just about to retire, having al-

ready rung for Juba to attend him to his chamber) should guess at the real state of his feelings respecting this young lady, he endeavoured to explain to the General what he intended to say, exhibiting much stronger symptoms of embarrassment and confusion than he had before, which provoked the General to such a degree of risibility, that notwithstanding the presence of the black, just as he was going out of the room, he exclaimed—

"Bravo, Henry, that will do; you are an old soldier, though you have got a young head upon your shoulders. Fanny has done your business, however, that is a clear point; in spite of all your manœuvring, you cannot get the better of it. Cupid has entwined his easy fetters about your heart, and you must ask Fanny Evelyn to lend you a helping hand to shake them off again; so good morning to you, Henry, and pleasant dreams to you. Juba, you black devil, how dare you have the insolence to be standing there, shewing your teeth?"

"Because, massa, me no able keep my mouth shuttee, when massa laugh," replied the black.

"And is that any reason why you presume to take the liberty of laughing too, you scoundrel?" cried the General, scarcely now able to resist laughing himself; but as this was by no means uttered in a tone of displeasure, Juba marched off very quietly with the lighted wax taper, preceding his master all the way to the door of his chamber in the most respectful and obedient silence, without once attempting to renew his propensity to laughter; and having undressed his master, and put him to bed, retired, wishing the General

good night, which was always the wonted custom of this faithful and affectionate black.

"Don't you let me lie in bed too long in the morning.—Do you hear, Juba?" uttered the General, as he gently closed the curtains.

To which Juba softly responded—

"Him morning now, massa; sun him peep quite bright in de windows. Juba call massa when night come again."

"Not so, Juba," cried the General; "but when you see Lady Primrose come down stairs to breakfast, let the hour be late or early, be sure to let me know."

"Yes, massa," cried Juba, and made his exit; resolved, though he had not permission to go to bed, that he would contrive to steal a nap in the old easy chair which was stationed in the servants' hall, where, by a comfortable fire which was always kept burning, he might enjoy a few hours repose, without being disturbed by any of the family, who were all stirring, and busy with their several occupations; and were every moment in the expectation of seeing their lady return home, after her nocturnal revels, which were indeed so seldom, that they had but little reason to complain of being kept out of their beds owing to the dissipated hours of their lovely mistress, whose mildness of manners and liberality of disposition towards them had rendered her the very idol of their hearts: for at the death of Lord Primrose, not one of the domestics had been willing to resign their situations, well knowing that if they were happy before, they would be doubly so in the service of the lovely widow, whose chief happiness consisted in making every body happy around

her: nor did they much fear the approach of a second husband, as a new master, when the choice was left to so sweet and lovely a creature. If his habitude of manners and disposition were congenial to her own, it would be the pride of their hearts to obey and to serve him with the most unshaken zeal, confidence, and fidelity.

During this time we may very naturally conclude that Ensign Conway could not keep his eyes open any more than the General, and that he had also taken the first opportunity of retiring to his chamber. But he did not sleep quite so sound as his patron, nor were his slumbers so refreshing; for Henry could not get Fanny Evelyn out of his head, for the life of him. He tumbled and tossed about the bed in a very restless and uncomfortable manner. He had never been half so feverish when on the eve of battle death stood in terrible array against him, and victory appeared doubtful; still the young soldier had slept in his tent, undismayed at the thoughts of the coming morrow, and his slumbers were peaceful and refreshing. But now, though stretched on a bed of costly down, accompanied with rich and magnificent hangings, he found sleep so coy a nymph, that he could not woo her to his arms, not even in the shape of Fanny Evelyn, whose soft smile and azure-coloured eyes, beaming with sensibility and expression, and whose light and graceful figure hovered over his pillow, till at length, overpowered by almost perfect weariness, he sunk into a profound slumber, and dreamt of angels, which had some resemblance to Fanny, though they were not mortal.

In this slumber we will leave him, if you please, to open the door to the lovely mistress of Stanmore Priory, who, at a quarter past five, once more returned to her magnificent mansion, so softly and quietly, that not even the carriage wheels could be heard as they proceeded along the avenue. She had expressly given orders to the coachman to drive up to the gates as gently as possible; so that she had arrived, and had even retired to her chamber, where her maid was waiting to receive her, without once disturbing the slumbers of her uncle, or making the least noise in the house. In short, Flora was perfectly oppressed with weariness, and was glad enough to be stripped of her costly finery, and steal quietly to bed, only inquiring of her woman at what time her uncle had gone to his chamber.

"I believe that the General and the young gentleman sat up for your Ladyship till a very late hour, my Lady," answered Rachel; "I think the clock in the great hall had struck four when the bell rung for the black servant to attend his master."

"Oh, my heavens! and did my dear uncle actually sit up so late?" exclaimed Flora. "I protest I am quite ashamed of being such a rake; but when one goes to a ball, you know, Rachel, one cannot avoid late hours, which, at any other time, I am not addicted to."

"Oh dear no, my Lady, to be sure you are not," answered Rachel; "and if you were, I don't see what right any body has to find fault with you: it is no more than what all ladies of rank and fashion do; it is the very life and soul of them, as a body may say, to sit up all night, and go to bed all day. I remember

when I used to be in service with the dowager Countess of Dragontale, she never knew what it was to see daylight; and she was no chicken. I often wondered how her Ladyship could carry on such a game."

"And pray how long might the game last, Rachel," cried Flora, tying the strings of her nightcap.

"Why, my Lady, till she was laid in her coffin," replied Rachel. "She was taken ill at a rout, grew worse when she got to the masquerade, and arrived at home, in Hanover-square, just time enough to expire in the arms of one of the footmen. Poor old lady, she had not a morsel of flesh left on her bones."

"And she did not deserve to have any, I think," cried Flora; "if such was the life she led, I do not wonder at the miserable exit she made out of a world, of which she could only have lived the pest, but surely no ornament to its society."

As the curtains were now finally closed around the head of her lovely mistress, Rachel did not intrude any further conversation to interrupt the repose she stood so much in need of, but softly stole out of the chamber, where her services were not required for many successive hours; during which Flora had slept profoundly.

The first inquiry that her Ladyship made of her woman when she again came to dress her, was, if her uncle was yet stirring. To which Rachel replied—

"No indeed, my Lady, your bell is the first that has rung yet; all is as still as a church mouse in the chamber of the General."

"So much the better," cried Flora, hastily throwing off her night dress. "Now if I could be ready in the

breakfast room before my uncle comes down stairs, it will be admirable. Whip me on any thing, Rachel, I don't mind what, so long as I am ready for my uncle. I shall have such a laugh against him and Ensign Conway, for being such lazy creatures, while I, who have been dancing all night long, have managed to rise before them."

Delighted with this thought, Flora very speedily arranged her toilet, confining her lovely and exuberant dark auburn tresses beneath the folds of a little mob lace cap, tied under her pretty round chin with a bow of pale pink ribband. She looked ten times lovelier, if possible, than she had done the evening before, when attired in all her costly splendour, and glittering in diamonds: in short, the beauty which so particularly characterized the face of the young and blooming widow, was that of genuine simplicity and unaffected grace; for ornament was rather a drawback than an advantage to such a face as Flora's; like a beautiful wild rose, she looked best in her native sweetness and innocence, and could not bear to be transplanted to the gay parterre, where only exotics reared their proud aspiring heads in regal pomp and stately splendour.

Thus arrayed, she tripped down stairs light as a sylph, and was stationed at the breakfast table, nay, she had actually made the tea, full one quarter of an hour before the General, or even Ensign Conway had made their appearance there; and when they did, she began to rally them most unmercifully on their early rising. The General exclaimed, while he laughed heartily at the lovely widow's pleasantry—

"Why, gad zookers, Flora, who would have thought

of seeing you down so soon, after the extraordinary exertion you have gone through at a public assembly, at which you staid so late that I suffered tortures in the apprehension that your health would be endangered by the fatigue: but here you are, you little gipsey, looking as fresh as a mountain daisy, does not she, Henry? Well, love, pour out the tea, after which you shall tell us all the news:—highly delighted with your fashionable friends, I have a shrewd guess, by the turn of that arch countenance."

"Yes, with some of them, truly delighted and gratified beyond expression, my dear uncle," answered Flora, a slight tint of additional colour mounting to her fair transparent cheek; "but they were not all so pleasant to my feelings."

"Very likely, my dear girl," cried the General; "but in so large and complicated an assembly of personages, you must expect to meet a great variety, which is not always pleasing; the term is too generally misapplied, in conformity to the vitiated taste of mankind, who pronounce that it is so without feeling or judgment. Well, Flora, now proceed; I am all impatience to hear your account of your first introduction to the *beau monde*, of which you must have had last night a tolerable sample, all ready cut and dried for exposure to public sale."

"Well then, uncle, I will first begin with the Countess of Stormond, and her two daughters, Lady Sophia and Lady Emmeline Russell. The Countess herself is a most elegant and accomplished woman; and oh, her manners are enchanting!"

"I told you so before you went, Flora, did not I?"

cried the General, with an air of satisfaction beaming through every feature; "I told you that she was an amiable woman. Though I never beheld the Countess of Stormond in my born days, yet I felt convinced she was worthy of the acquaintance of my Flora.—Well, now for the young ladies. Sophia is the elder, I suppose, whose birth-day was so highly complimented. She is beautiful as a Hebe, I imagine—hey, Flora?"

To which Flora, with some hesitation, replied—

"Why yes, uncle, Lady Sophia is certainly handsome, and is no doubt esteemed more critically so than her young sister, who appears to be about seventeen years of age; but I think her ten thousand times more interesting than Lady Sophia, and, if I mistake not, she is far more amiable: though perhaps she does not rival her sister in wit and fashionable acquirements, she will always be superior in those endearing qualities which insensibly steal upon the heart, and engage its affections. She has a look of innocence which is perfectly infantine, and which is accompanied with a manner so open and ingenuous, and so unaffected, that before you have spoken half a dozen words to her, you feel disposed to place confidence in her disposition. But it is quite different with her fashionable sister, who inspires sentiments of a very contrary nature; I would say repellent ones, if you did not think me too severe, uncle. She talks a great deal, laughs a great deal, and rallies a great deal, with infinite address, which, though uttered with smiles, seems to carry much bitter irony along with it."

"Very good, Flora; you could not have drawn a character better if you had been an authoress.—Well,

now for the rest of the *dramatis personæ* in this fashionable assembly,"

"Oh, I cannot positively describe them all to you, uncle," retorted Flora; "I can only mention those to whom I was particularly introduced by the amiable Countess, as being among the number of her very particular friends. One venerable lady, of exalted rank, very irresistibly attracted my attention towards her; for never did I behold age so blended with youthful sprightliness without youthful folly. I had the honour of being seated next to her when I first made my entrance to the rooms; and you cannot imagine how relieved and amused I was with her manner of conversing with me. I remained by the side of the dowager Duchess of Pemberton till I commenced dancing. Her Grace is a distant relative of the Stormond family. Well, uncle, then I began to dance."

"So I conclude," cried the General; "and pray, Flora, who had the happiness (for I think he must have found it so) of obtaining you for a partner?"

"Oh my gracious! it was so intolerably provoking, uncle, you cannot conceive. Why, who but a Sir Charles Ratcliff, the most forward, conceited, and incorrigible puppy in the whole room," answered she.

"Indeed," cried the General, "that is strange, when you had so many to make choice of among the numerous noble personages there present."

"Indeed I had no choice at all, uncle," answered Flora, now blushing deeply, "or I should not have selected Sir Charles from among the many, believe me."

"What, and did no person ask you to dance besides him?" inquired the General.

"Yes, several, uncle; but he was the first, and being introduced to me by the Countess, I could not afterwards decline dancing with him, although I should have preferred almost any one else to this disagreeable, familiar young baronet," cried Flora.

"Confound his familiarity, if he presumed to be impertinently so," uttered the General, in a tone highly expressive of his feelings. "Gad zookers, I wish I had been there to have seen him taking any improper licence, either by looks or by words; I would have made mince meat of him in half a second. But you did not retain this fellow for your partner, if you did not like him, during the whole of the evening, surely, Flora?"

"Why yes I did, uncle, and how could I help it, when every body else came too late to engage me for the ensuing quadrilles? Sir Charles had already preceded them, and I was obliged unwillingly to dance with him again. But, to say truth, although I did not like his conversation or his manners, yet his dancing was excellent; he was the best dancer in the whole of the rooms."

"D—n his dancing," angrily vociferated the General; "a monkey, well taught, would have performed his exercise as well. Don't talk to me of a man's dancing, Flora, if he has nothing better to recommend him."

The idea of a monkey and Sir Charles Ratcliff so closely assimilating together had occasioned both Flora and Henry to laugh immoderately; and she exclaimed—

"But indeed, dear uncle, I must positively set you

to rights in one mistaken notion you have formed respecting the young baronet. The kind of familiarity which he adopted towards me was not that which modesty or good manners could possibly have taken offence at. You cannot imagine that I would have continued dancing with him a single moment, had such been the case. I merely speak of the fulsome compliments he was pleased to pay me."

"And which every familiar puppy pays to every pretty woman that happens to fall in his way," cried the General. "He cannot say any thing sensible or rational, so he has recourse to a parcel of unmeaning jargon, by way of filling up time. Well, if he did nothing more than extol your beauty, Flora, we must readily pardon him.—Well, were there no other male characters whom you conversed with, but this Sir Charles Ratcliff?"

"Oh yes, uncle!" cried Flora, again blushing deeply, though perfectly unconscious of the beautiful suffusion which had in one moment crimsoned her face and neck, and which did not wholly escape the observation of Sir Hector Oldstock, (which certainly was now the proper title of the veteran soldier.) "Oh yes, uncle!" again repeated Flora, "there was a Lord Clairville, a very elegant and accomplished nobleman, and an Honourable Captain Ponsonby, who appeared to be on terms of particular intimacy with the Stormond family: in short, it required but little discernment to perceive that the latter gentleman is the avowed and passionate admirer of Lady Sophia Russell; I do not know, however, whether as yet he is an accepted one. Then, uncle, there was a—a—a——My gracious! I had nearly

forgotten his name, though he handed me into the carriage!——A Marquis of Rosalvie, nephew to the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, with whose conversation and manners I have already told you I was so charmed."

"And were you equally charmed with the manners and conversation of her nephew, Flora?" demanded Sir Hector, archly.

A deeper crimson than before tinted the cheeks of Flora, and she replied, with some degree of embarrassment—

"No, not charmed, uncle, I cannot say that; but"—

Flora stopped, and seeing Henry's cup empty, hastily inquired if he would take some more tea. Henry bowed assent; and Flora, during the ceremony of pouring it out, had time enough to recover from her confusion. With more precision than was absolutely necessary, she once more addressed her uncle—

"I do not say I was altogether charmed on so sudden an acquaintance with one whom, till that night, I had never seen, uncle," uttered she; "but he was certainly the most rational and interesting character in the whole group, though a melancholy one."

"How melancholy and rational? It is a strange combination, Flora," cried Sir Hector, now eyeing his lovely niece with peculiar symptoms of curiosity; "for who the devil that is a rational being will long indulge in mournful and melancholy retrospection, without indeed there were existing causes, which render them morally impossible to be eradicated? Are there not roses scattered in our path of life, as well as thorns? And they are fools only who do not gather them while

they can. Zounds! I hate a melancholy man, who would make all men unhappy, because he imagines himself alone to be miserable."

"But I do not think, uncle," uttered Flora, "that you would hate the Marquis of Rosalvie, were you once to behold him, for he does not intrude his sorrows upon any one, nor does he appear particularly solicitous to hide them; he seems too ingenuous and open for that. I had, as I have said before, but little opportunity of conversing with any one but Sir Charles Ratcliff."

"Then how came you to be so well informed of the melancholy disposition of this Marquis of Rosalvie, my dear Flora?" inquired Sir Hector, not a little curious to hear something more of a character which his niece had praised so highly.

"It was the Countess of Stormond who told me, before I had addressed a word to the Marquis, that his strange habitude of manners, which rendered him so peculiarly grave and eccentric at his youthful season of life, was owing to a private domestic misfortune, which happened in a foreign and far distant country; that it was of a nature most wounding to his feelings, and that time had not yet thrown a veil over the poignancy of its bitter smart. In short, uncle, the Countess did not hesitate to pronounce that an unhappy and ill-formed connection with a lady whom the Marquis had once passionately adored, but who had perfidiously deceived him, was the cause of his present state of dejection; that it long preyed upon the vigour of his youthful constitution, and rendered him insensible to the blessings of society; but that he was now returned

to confide his sorrows to the sympathizing bosom of his only surviving relative, a kind and affectionate aunt, with whom he hoped to recover his lost peace of mind. Uncle, I could not hear this tale recounted by the amiable Countess without feeling interested in the misfortunes of this unhappy young nobleman, apparently possessed of intellects so bright, and with a countenance which also appears to be the index of a noble heart. You, uncle, would not deny the sympathy due to his exalted character, and to merit so suffering and so abused."

Various had been the changes of complexion in the lovely widow during this recital of the misfortunes of Rosalvie; and various the conjectures which filled the mind of Sir Hector, when she had completely finished it. He felt convinced that there was something more than sympathy that so deeply interested Flora in the misfortunes of this mysterious Marquis, (for so he thought him,) or she would not have been at the pains of so accurately describing the nature of his griefs. There was a warmer glow on her lovely cheek, when speaking of the Marquis, than an entire and indifferent stranger would have called forth so suddenly; and there was also a sensibility in her eyes, which were almost humid with a tear, as she deplored the unhappy malady of this young nobleman, which yet more strongly confirmed the half-formed suspicion in the mind of Sir Hector, that Flora, feeling so deeply for his misfortunes, had also been as deeply struck by his uncommon perfections: there was hardly a doubt of it, by the emotion she had betrayed; for Flora was the genuine child of nature and simplicity, and would never

affect what she did not feel. And how could he condemn her for a feeling so natural? If this Marquis was really the character she had described, why should not Flora feel regret at his unhappy malady as well as another? And why should she not admire him, if he were worthy of her admiration? Flora was her own mistress, was a widow, and a young and lovely one into the bargain. Having once married to please her father and her old maiden aunt, she had now an indisputable right to marry to please herself; and in spite of all the guardians in the world, he would advise her so to do, whenever she could meet a man to her mind. But with respect to this Marquis, he knew not what to say, or what to think, till he had once seen him; and that he would do the very first opportunity, without letting Flora know any thing at all about the business. There was certainly some objection in his having once loved, and been deceived by another woman; and in his forming a second attachment, there might be some prejudices imbibed not much to the advantage of poor Flora; for well did Sir Hector know the propensities so strongly ingrafted in the hearts of his precious sex. Men do not easily forget old grudges, and former injuries shewn to them by women, though they have the audacity to expect that women are to forget all theirs; and Sir Hector would have liked much better that the Marquis of Rosalvie had not loved but once, and that once only Flora. He himself had loved but once; and he felt well assured that once would last for ever, although the object of his early affection had mouldered into dust long since. But that object was the mother of Flora! No wonder then that her offspring

held a higher place than any other object in his affections. Flora too was the image of that mother, and she breathed again in every pulse, in every nerve, though the feelings she excited were of a more sacred and less passionate kind. The presence of Flora was a new existence to him, which he had not felt for many years; and, whether wife or widow, he could not long remain absent from this darling of his affections.

But Flora did not know all this; never had mortal revealed to her this tale—that her mother had, in early days, been destined for the bride of her dear uncle Hector, and that fatal treachery and ambition on the part of her father and aunt, had been the only cause of separating them. Had Flora known this, she would have blended pity with her natural affection for so dear a relative, and revered him more than ever: but this tale was yet to reach her ear. Often indeed had she remarked that the name of her mother was never mentioned in the presence of her uncle without his suddenly betraying an emotion which seemed extraordinary, as being only the wife of his brother; and that he always shed tears in recounting the matchless virtues of the tender parent she had so early lost. Her being so amiable a woman as her uncle often described, was the only cause to which she could attribute his so deeply rooted affection.

After a long pause had succeeded the eulogium which Flora had given to the merits of the Marquis of Rosalvie, Sir Hector, who was determined that she should not guess at his thoughts, jocosely exclaimed—

"Well, my love, it is not at all unlikely but I may one day see this Marquis of Rosalvie, of whose merits

I have received so favourable an impression from lips that would disdain uttering untruths. But do you not know, my Flora, that pity is one of the most insidious and dangerous sensations that woman can feel for man?"

"And why so, dear uncle?" inquired Flora, with a roseate blush; "it is not criminal surely to pity the suffering and the unfortunate?"

"No; but it is the sister of love," uttered Sir Hector; "what say you to that, Flora?"

"I cannot positively say any thing at present, uncle, to such an assertion; and wonder much how you can think of asking me, when you know how utterly impossible it is for me to answer such a question," cried the lovely widow, now wishing to evade the subject as much as possible. For that purpose, she instantly proposed to take a ride over to the parsonage, and ask the worthy pastor and his family to dinner. "For I know," uttered she, "how anxious dear Mrs. Evelyn will be to hear all about the ball. Besides, I want to see Fanny."

"And so does somebody else want to see Fanny, besides your Ladyship," cried Sir Hector, laughing, and glancing his eyes obliquely towards the young soldier. "Moreover, they would not care if they were to see Fanny every hour in the twenty-four. And Fanny will be here very shortly, I expect, with her father and her mother, whom I invited to dine at the Priory, without ever asking your Ladyship's permission, because, gad zookers, I knew they would be welcome to my Flora."

"Well, and I hope you will continue to invite whoever you please here, uncle, without *her Ladyship's*

permission, and they will all be welcome to your Flora, for that very reason," cried Flora, with so enchanting a smile of good humoured sweetness, as she glided out of the room to give some orders to her housekeeper, that Sir Hector, in the most delighted accents, exclaimed—

"Zounds! who could be angry with so sweet a creature? Gad zookers, if Flora was to take a fancy to the very devil, and marry him, I believe I should like him on her account."

The whimsicality of this thought, in spite of the gravity of Ensign Conway on all other occasions, produced an involuntary fit of laughter, which almost convulsed him; well knowing that impiety was not a feature in the character or principles of his patron, and that what he had then uttered was the mere effusion of a moment. Ashamed, however, of having given utterance to so wild a thought, Sir Hector exhibited some signs of contrition—

"Zounds! I could not mean any thing in the shape of that ill-looking gentleman, neither, Henry," uttered he; "an angel of purity can have but little association with him. I only meant to say, that if Flora married a second time, I should regard the husband for the sake of the wife; that is the whole of the business."

"Which I so perfectly understand, my dear General," cried Henry, "that no further explanation is at all necessary."

Sir Hector regarding his young friend with a smile of ineffable satisfaction, immediately proposed taking a walk over the grounds of the Priory, which, at the opening of spring's delightful season, afforded so many

boundless and beautiful prospects of the surrounding country, as well as magnificent seats of different noblemen who lived in the neighbourhood of Northamptonshire. Among these, at a small distance from Stanmore Priory, was the ancient mansion of Sir Jasper Wilding, a fox-hunting baronet of the old school, which he conformed to with the utmost precision imaginable, never departing from one of the old-established customs of his ancestors on any occasion whatever. He was so worldly-wise and parsimonious in his principles, that he had taken his housekeeper to wife, merely because she had evinced some extraordinary points of as extraordinary frugality; for she possessed the invaluable art of making old clothes, actually worn out, look like new ones, putting feet to old stockings when she could no longer bestow the darning needle on them, and when time had been so uncivil as to make holes which not all her dexterity could again repair. She had also other qualifications: Betty Ironsides (for that was the spinster's name) could make puddings without eggs, or even milk, cowslip wine without sugar, and even brew strong beer without hops. But how she did it, Heaven knows: she had a way of her own, as she used to say to her dear master, and that way found favour in his sight. In short, Sir Jasper discovered so many bright accomplishments in Betty Spinster, and all tending so much to his private interest and the improvement of his domestic economy, that, after due consideration, he one morning took Betty to church, and made her Lady Wilding, to the profound astonishment of the parson, the clerk, and the whole parish besides. His brother fox-hunters

rallied him a little on so extraordinary an election; to all of which Sir Jasper made the following reply—

"I have saved my pocket. Better to have a wife for use than for ornament."

But Sir Jasper, penny wise and pound foolish, could not then see the succeeding event which was to take place just exactly nine months after his marriage with his favourite Betty; for though the spinster was not by any means in the bloom of youth, she was yet young enough to make Sir Jasper father to as fine a little fellow as ever popped his nose out in a frosty morning; and he was hailed, on the birth of his son and heir, with the following salutation from his brother hunters—

"Wish you joy, brother Wilding. How stands the savings of your pocket now, my old one?"

While another loudly vociferated—

"Who would not marry a wife for use, and not for ornament?"

But with all these jokes, paid in his own coin, Sir Jasper was obliged to put up, though he often broke a sigh in suffocating smoke from the fumes of tobacco. The business was done, and he could not help it. Betty was his wife, and he could not untie the fatal knot which the parson had made. As for the child, he could not but acknowledge that he was the father of it, so he must e'en provide for the unwelcome little stranger on the most saving plan that was possible. And what had he to fear? Betty knew how to contrive things in the cheapest manner imaginable; for Betty had a way of her own, superior to any woman in the

world, in point of frugality and economy. But lo, and behold! Betty's way, though equally her own, was altered; for, no longer in the capacity of an humble domestic, she was now the wife of Sir Jasper Wilding, and had brought him a son, to inherit, one day or other, his title and estate. Soon after the birth of little Thomas, therefore, (for that was the name given to young Wilding,) Betty began to assume a very different aspect to her worthy spouse, and to exhibit qualifications which Sir Jasper had never thought her possessed of. She had no notion now of saving, but of expending the vast property of her husband, which she had assisted him in accumulating; and instead of billing and cooing, perpetual jars and quarrels ensued. Sir Jasper cursed the day that ever he married Betty Spinster, and Betty blessed that on which she had given birth to her darling boy; who was certainly, in all but Sir Jasper's eyes, one of the finest young fellows that ever existed, but, at the same instant, one of the wildest. Indulged by his fond mother in every gratification of his wishes, he received no check to correct the impetuosity of his disposition, which was, however, open and generous: and though his father told him he should never inherit one shilling of his property, for his thoughtless extravagance, yet there were times when Sir Jasper felt proud of being the father of so fine a young fellow; the more, when he reflected that, though wild, he was not profligate, or guilty of one dishonourable action, that would reflect disgrace upon his ancestors.

Lady Wilding, however, did not live to see the

exalted station in which she hoped that her darling Thomas would be placed—namely, to succeed his father in his title and inheritance, for which she had constantly prayed; for, before young Wilding had attained the age of twenty-one, she was no more, to the very great joy of Sir Jasper, and the sincere regret of her son: for Thomas, though he had no violent affection for his father, yet he had always loved his mother, and treated her with every mark of respect and duty; nor did he follow her to the grave without shedding tears of genuine nature and sensibility.

"Thomas, you have now lost your mother," cried Sir Jasper, when they returned from her funeral.

"To my eternal sorrow and regret," sighed out young Wilding. "She was a kind mother to me, and a good wife to you."

"That is a cursed lie, Tom," cried Sir Jasper; "she was the plague of my existence after she became Lady Wilding: but before I was fool enough to marry her, I will own that Betty Spinster had some claim to my affection; she was a prudent woman then, but matrimony turned her head."

"Which it has done wiser heads than my mother's, Sir," observed young Wilding, dryly.

"So it has Tom, so it has," cried Sir Jasper; "that is a very sensible remark; stick to it, my boy, as long as you live, and remain a batchelor for the sake of your father."

As this was uttered with some degree of affection, it was not certain whether young Wilding did not, in the fulness of his heart, make a sort of covenant with Sir

Jasper, that he would never marry without his consent; which mark of his obedience so highly pleased and gratified the old gentleman, that he called him his dear son, bade him be a good boy and mind his studies, and learn to be saving, and that in time he would repair the extravagance of Betty, and the wilful waste she had lately made on his property.

"Then, you know, Tom," uttered Sir Jasper, "you will one day be the better for it; nay, you will jump into the whole estate of Thrifty Manor, if you learn to be saving; but, curse me, if ever I catch you at any of your old tricks again, if I don't cut you off with one shilling: so here is twenty guineas for pocket money; take care of it. When you get to Cambridge, mind your learning; for I intend you to be a great man. And remember, Tom, I will hear no more of your idle charities. Charity beginneth at home. Stick to that all the days of your life; it is a wise proverb."

Whether young Wilding was exactly of his father's opinion, or how long he held this proverb in his mind, we cannot determine: but this we know, that he pocketed the twenty guineas, and, with an air of respectful humility, as he was just stepping into the chaise, bade Sir Jasper farewell.

On his arrival at Cambridge, Tom heard of the distresses of a fellow-student, and, forgetting that "charity beginneth at home," presented the one half of the contents of his purse to relieve the miseries of his unfortunate friend. Had Sir Jasper known of it, he would have gone mad at the imprudence of the action. But what of Sir Jasper? A recording angel had wrote

it down in that page from which no mortal hand could ever erase it; and young Wilding was forgiven for disobedience to his father's commands in that court where charity doth not begin at home, but which dispenseth its blessings to all who have merited its support and deserved its protection.

CHAPTER XI.

BENVOLIO. Too proud to beg—too poor to be proud;
Too honest to be a rogue—too spirited to be mean;
Too modest to be bold—and too bold to despair!
MARCUS. By my faith, Benvolio, a noble character;
What is he?
BENVOLIO. An author!

OLD ENGLISH PLAY.

AFTER nearly an hour and a half had passed in rambling over the beautiful grounds of Stanmore Priory, which were laid out with such exquisite taste and simplicity by the directions of the lovely mistress of this ancient and truly magnificent mansion, Sir Hector Oldstock and Ensign Conway halted for a moment on the declivity of a sloping hill to take a particular survey of the gloomy edifice which they had just come in sight of, which was no other than the residence of Sir Jasper Wilding, the *virtues* of whose character and singularity of whose disposition, our readers are now too perfectly acquainted with to need any further illustration. We shall only describe the abode which this singular being inhabited, which, like himself, was

nearly out of date, as it was completely out of the fashion of the present modish and enlightened times. Surely nothing ever exhibited any thing half so dreary and terrific as this neglected and desolate mansion of so strange a master; which the young soldier (to whom, in the course of their ramble, Sir Hector had related the character of Sir Jasper, as having formerly been an old associate of his brother, Sir Oliver) viewed with unspeakable astonishment and curiosity.

The front part of this singular mansion had certainly once had both ornaments and windows to attract the eye of the passing traveller: but the former of these had been entirely defaced by the hoary hand of time, which art had never been employed to repair. It remained in doubt, therefore, whether the lions had been intended to represent pigs, or the pigs to represent lions; for not a vestige either of the heads or the tails were distinguishable; and all that could be guessed at of their former ancient structure was, that they were animals, but to what class they belonged, it was not in the power of mortal to tell. As to the windows, not a pane of glass was in them but was either cracked or broken; and those that were entirely destitute of any glass at all, the moss and ivy had made bold to creep into, and the birds to build their nests in, perfectly quiet, and unmolested in their operations by any interruption from Sir Jasper, who, even when Betty Spinster was living and basking in the very sunshine of his favour, would never hear of any new glass being put in, in lieu of the old and broken ones, observing that nothing was so conducive to health and vigour of constitution as plenty of fresh air. By the same rule

he was guided also in having plenty of fresh water; for when the rain poured in torrents through many parts of this almost roofless habitation, Betty very carefully supplied all the empty tubs and pitchers she could collect together, to save the expence of purchasing soft water, which could only be procured at the distance of two miles from Thrifty Manor, against washing time. Above these apertures, so exposed to the beatings of the pityless storm and tempestuous weather, were an innumerable quantity of pigeon-holes, which, having a proportionable number of these winged tenants within them, and being filthy and dirty, gave a very obnoxious and disgusting appearance to the front of this ancient building. But of these Sir Jaspet was passionately fond, and would on no account have any of them molested, or converted into pigeon-pies, because he bred them for public sale, and, to use his own particular phrase, "they always served to bring *grist to the mill.*" On one occasion, however, young Wilding had incurred a heavy penalty from his father's displeasure, by committing some depredations on this part of Sir Jasper's property. During the time of his vacation from college, he had several times amused himself by shooting at the young pigeons; and it was not a few that he succeeded in bringing to the ground; of which his mamma and him had the private picking: but being once detected in this sport by Sir Jasper, he never durst venture on it again.

"Fon by the Lord Harry," cried Sir Jasper, "if ever you shoot at another pigeon upon my premises, Tom, I will shoot *you.*"

His threat would certainly have [redacted] had but little weight on the incorrigible Thomas, if Lady Wilding had not, with tears in her eyes, implored her darling boy not to offend his father again by committing this outrage on his dear birds. Tom promised her that he never would; and, we believe, he never transgressed again in the like manner in his future visits to Thrifty Manor.

Before the mansion there was once a lawn, ever verdant in summer, and in winter kept neatly in order: but this was not the case under the management of its present master; for the lawn now exhibited a perfect wilderness, all overgrown with weeds and noxious plants, which Sir Jasper would not be at the expence of having cleared away, alleging that they cost nothing, and were far more preferable to him than trees or flowers, on that account. Thus, through neglect, the rude hand of desolation was suffered to encroach, year after year, on the dwelling of Sir Jasper Wilding, in which neither wild rose nor eglantine would condescend to impart their sweets; nor daisy, nor bluebell, sheltered its lovely offspring there. But this grieved not Sir Jasper; he had no taste for flowers, nor had Betty Spinster much. They loved the hounds that followed the scent of the poor timid hare; and it was probably owing to the congeniality of taste and feeling in these two singular personages, that they were so strongly attracted towards each other: it is very likely, for we grow insensibly fond of those who exhibit the same weaknesses, and are guilty of the same follies as we are conscious of possessing ourselves; as if that were an excuse for them, which is only an aggravation of our offences.

But to proceed. It was at the foot of the sloping primrose hill that Sir Hector and the young soldier stopped, to view more attentively than at a distance, the habitation of Sir Jasper Wilding. Henry, in the utmost astonishment, exclaimed—

"Good heavens! how dreary and how neglected is that venerable structure! the original appearance of which I cannot form the slightest conception. The pigeons are the only tenants which inhabit it, I suppose, for surely no human being would live in such an uncomfortable abode."

"There you are certainly under a mistake, Henry," cried Sir Hector, smiling; "for the being who inhabits it is the very man of whom I have been speaking. That almost falling edifice is no other than Thrifty Manor, the residence and ancient seat of Sir Jasper Wilding, who was the chosen and intimate friend of my wise and delectable brother, Sir Oliver. I knew the old boy too, and was, I remember, a bit of a favourite of Betty Spinster's. Gad zookers! I have a great mind to pay the old curmudgeon a visit, and make him unclose those rusty gates, which were never yet open to hospitality."

"I own I have some curiosity to behold so singular a character," answered the young Ensign.

"Say you so?" cried Sir Hector; "come on then, quick march, down to the foot of the hill, where we will presently lay siege to the garrison in due form. If we cannot make him surrender, we shall have some sport, at least, in being able to frighten him out of his wits."

Away they posted towards the habitation of the old

miser. After ringing at the old rusty gates for nearly a quarter of an hour, an ancient domestic, in the capacity of porter, and also valet and groom of the chamber, admitted them, on Sir Hector stating that he came on particular business to Sir Jasper, and would not detain him more than ten minutes.

"Will you then please, gentlemen, to walk into this little room?" cried the old man, opening the door of an adjoining apartment, which was furnished according to a huntsman's taste; for there was not a picture in it that did not represent the shape and size of some favourite pointer. Over the fire-place was suspended, by way of ornament, a huge pair of stag's horns; while Betty's samplers, wrought in her maiden days, and under the inspection of her grandmother, supplied the rest of the decorations in Sir Jasper's sitting room, to the no small amusement of the young soldier and his patron, who laughed heartily at this admirable specimen of Betty's taste and the huntsman's judgment; while the old porter stood surveying them in no very complacent manner.

"I suppose you don't mind waiting for half an hour or so, now you have got something to amuse you, gentlemen?" uttered he with a surly grin.

To which Sir Hector, giving him a look which soon had the tendency to soften the asperity of his frosty features, as it was accompanied with some odd silver, which he threw into the old man's dusty brown hat, jocosely answered—

"And why must we wait for half an hour, my good fellow? Think'st thou that I am stocked with more

patience than Sir Jasper? Why cannot I speak with him immediately, pray?"

"Pardon my boldness, your Honour," returned the porter, now cringing and bowing down to the very ground; "but you must know, that just before your Honour came in, master popped into the counting-house, to settle some accounts with one of his tenants; and, from the high words that have passed between them, I have a pretty good guess that the business the young man came upon is not of a very agreeable nature to master's feelings, as he slammed the door in my face a few minutes ago, only because I happened to go in to put a few coals on the fire. Now, your Honour, if I was to shew my face in the counting-house again before he has settled his business, he would certainly make no bones of knocking me down as flat as a flounder."

"Indeed!" cried Sir Hector, laughing, "Well then, we will certainly not provoke him to do that, if we can help it, and, on that consideration, will wait his leisure; for if he is transacting disagreeable business, the sooner it is got rid of, the better."

On these words, Sir Hector and Henry having quietly seated themselves, the porter bowed respectfully, and retired. He had no sooner made his exit, than the voice of Sir Jasper Wilding became very distinguishable, as he appeared to be addressing some person in loud and discordant accents. He seemed nearly choked with passion; and among the sentences which escaped from his lips, were the following—

"And so, Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em, you have been

telling me all this here cock and a bull story about your fine books, and your authorship, on purpose to fudge me out of the money you owe me for the rent of the cottage, which I have been fool enough to let you live in for six months without seeing the colour of your money. But curse me, Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em, if I am going to be fudged off any longer by any such idle pack of tales. If you be such a clever *genes* as you would have me suppose, you must *genes* me my money, or you shall turn out of Whitethorn Cottage to-morrow morning, do you hear, Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em? so that is the long and short of it. And now what have you got to say to that?"

A mournful, but manly voice, immediately responded to this unfeeling speech—

"For myself, Sir Jasper, nothing; for my wife, and three little helpless innocents, I would say much to move your compassion and excite your pity towards them, if you would permit me; and I pledge my word and honour, (which I hold dearer than life,) that if you will only grant me the indulgence a few days longer to remain in Whitethorn Cottage, I shall then be able to discharge my whole arrears of rent. I intimated this to your son, young Mr. Wilding, only a week since, when I had the honour of seeing him, and he was kind enough to assure me that he would intercede with you in my behalf."

"He did, did he?" cried Sir Jasper; "but he knew better than to ask me any such thing; the wild, extravagant young puppy knew he dare as well be hanged as have the impudence to shew his nose in the busi-

ness. And pray, Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em, what has my son to do with the money that you owe to me?"

"I did not aver that he had, Sir Jasper," replied the supplicant, in a yet more firm and energetic tone; "but he has something to do with feeling and humanity; if I may be allowed to judge of the human countenance, I cannot be mistaken in that which nature has given to the fine, intelligent, and benevolent features of Mr. Thomas Wilding."

The asperity of Sir Jasper was certainly somewhat softened towards his apparently distressed and unfortunate tenant, by the effect of this speech, though he attempted by every effort to conceal it; and he exclaimed—

"This is a very pretty tale, indeed, Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em; and so, because Tom is a handsome young fellow, I am to be put off from day to day from receiving your rent. He has been telling you a parcel of cursed nonsense, I suppose, about his being the heir of my estate, and that he will have a great deal of money of his own to squander away after my death: but don't believe any such thing, Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em, it is a cursed lie; for Tom won't have a shilling of my property, I can assure you: I have disinherited him long ago, a rascal, I have."

"I hope, Sir Jasper, that you will revoke a sentence so severe and so unjust to your only son, from whose lips, may I perish this moment, if ever I heard a sentence contrary to the affection and the duty that he owes to his father."

A pause of some moments ensued, during which all

traces of displeasure had disappeared from the before surly brows of Sir Jasper Wilding; and he actually smiled as he pronounced—

"Well, Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em, as you seem to have so good an opinion of my son, why I suppose I must not let you have a bad opinion of his father; so there, take the three days, and three weeks after that, to pay your rent. But don't tell Tom a word about it, mind that; the rascal, the profligate, if he knows that you have succeeded with me on his account, he will come and ask me to give him fifty pounds, to keep up his idle expences, his wanton waste, his foolish extravagance. I assure you, Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em, that my son, Tom Wilding, is a sad dog: it would take half my estate to support his extravagant pleasures. Curse me, if I don't think that he would keep all the widows, and father all the children in the parish, if they went and told him a tale of distress."

"And if doing so noble a benefaction without injuring himself, Sir Jasper, were in his power, who could blame or censure a conduct so exemplary, a character so unequalled?" uttered the stranger. "Oh! may Heaven reward him tenfold for every good deed, for every blessing he has dispensed around! It will, it surely will! Though ingratitude is found in man, it has no place in heaven! And now, Sir Jasper, permit me to return you thanks for the lenity you have shewn towards me. In less than the time you have so kindly granted to me, I will discharge my debt. In the mean time I would willingly give you some proof of the sincerity of my intentions, and the integrity of my principles, by depositing in your hands a security,

which I will redeem when I discharge my arrears of rent."

Sir Jasper, now feeling highly satisfied with the character of his tenant, only replied—

"You may do that, if you think it necessary, Mr. What-d'ye-call'em; but remember, I did not ask you for it. And now do tell me how you can get a living by writing books. Not but what I have heard Tom praise people that wrote books, and call them *geneses:* though I never knew exactly what he meant by it, yet I supposed it was something vastly clever, and all that sort of thing. But do you actually make a trade of it, Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em?"

To so singular an inquiry, an answer was returned in the following manner—

"No, sir; but my necessities compel me to write for others who make a trade of it, only because I am too poor to publish for myself. They reduce me to prices far, very far inadequate to the merits of the works, which they sell profitably for themselves, but, unfortunately, not so for the author, whose profits are as insignificant as his necessities are importunate.

"Curse me if I would write for any such shabby venders at all, then," cried Sir Jasper.

"Nor would I, Sir Jasper," uttered the stranger, in a desponding accent; "but I bear in my memory, nay, in my heart, an excuse that must instantly silence all objections, and extinguish all pride, if indeed my miseries have still left me any—my wife, and my children; to me they look for bread, for support. I have talent; it was the bounteous gift of Heaven alone; to no mortal hand am I indebted for it; and it

is my duty to exert it, when no other means are left me to gain an honourable living; and all other I despise."

"It may be honourable enough," cried Sir Jasper, "but curse me if I don't think it is a devilish poor one."

No answer was returned to an observation so grossly indelicate and unfeeling. Bound in the icy fetters of a pecuniary obligation, the unfortunate author, (for such he was,) could say nothing; but laying a folded manuscript on the table, as security for his arrears of rent, bowed respectfully, and very quickly made his exit from Thrifty Manor.

The whole of this conversation had been carried on in a high key, and every sentence had reached the ears of Sir Hector Oldstock and Ensign Conway. They appeared to be separated from the adjoining apartment only by a slight partition; and no sooner had the stranger retreated, than Sir Hector, who had been deeply interested in their discourse, exclaimed, in a whisper to his young companion,—

"Heaven be praised, that poor fellow is at last emancipated from the claws of that infernal old harpy. Henry, we must discharge his arrears of rent, and purchase his book: though I cannot tell what it is about, yet the language of such a man is the title-page to his works, which, I feel well convinced, will reflect no disgrace on him, or any author living."

"Nor any who are dead either," cried Ensign Conway; "and how highly has he eulogized the character of young Wilding!"

"And not without his having merited the eulogium,

I dare say," returned Sir Hector. "I have a good opinion of poor Tom, but a cursed bad one of the father; the lesson he got out of Sir Oliver's book has served for the memorandum of his whole life. But gad zookers! let us do something for this poor devil of an author. I don't like doing things by halves—you understand me, Henry: we must get him out of the bands of his rapacious landlord: and I will do that thing, Henry; I will go and ask Flora to lend me the sum of fifty pounds. But hold; had I not better inquire his name first; the old brute gave him the appellation of Mr. What-d'ye-call-'em, at once a proof of his ignorance, and his total deficiency of good sense, humanity, and the common rules of good breeding."

"I grant he has been somewhat uncivil to the unfortunate stranger," replied the young soldier, "yet he has at last, from some motive or other, been induced to extend some marks of lenity towards him."

"And devilish few marks," retorted Sir Hector, "scarcely worth naming, when put into competition with his unparalleled insolence. To throw a man's profession into his teeth, when he obtains a morsel of bread by honest means; and to wound his feelings, by casting any reproach upon it, when poverty has already humbled those feelings to the dust; he who does this, is unworthy of the name of man. And d—n such lenity, I say, or the charity which is got by rubbing one shilling against the other. Would that I knew the name of this unfortunate man, that I might quickly set him above such grovelling, low-minded, worldly, mercenary wretches as Sir Jasper Wilding."

Ensign Conway perceived that his patron was wax-

ing warm apace; for it was one of the propensities of Sir Hector Oldstock, to do a good and benevolent action whenever he found that the object of his bounty was meritorious or praiseworthy. It had been the leading feature of his whole life, even when only a poor lieutenant, to dispense kindness and compassion to the unfortunate, the oppressed, and the most wretched of his fellow-creatures; and now that the fortunes of war had raised him to the rank of a general in the army, and the death of his brother had given him an estate of seven thousand a year, it was not to be supposed that having it more in his power to dispense blessings around him, his early habits of doing good had deserted him. Ah, no! not such a changing and capricious being was this noble and generous son of Mars. He had not changed with his fortune, though his fortune had changed with him; but now he had a purse as full as his heart, he resolved that it should never be shut against the miseries of his fellow men, whenever he thought that they possessed an undoubted right to the claim of humanity. While he was deliberating in what manner he should relieve the wants of the suffering author in a way that would be least hurtful to his feelings as a delicate and sensible-minded man, Sir Jasper Wilding having been apprized of the arrival of the gentlemen, made his appearance. At the sight of Sir Hector, who immediately informed him who he was, he started with the most involuntary surprise and amazement, as scarcely crediting the perfect evidence of his senses.

"Why, gad zookers, Sir Jasper," cried Sir Hector, "dost not yet call to thy recollection the wild and in-

corrigible young puppy whom you and my good brother, Sir Oliver, used to prophesy would never be worth a bright shilling while he existed? But here I am, my old boy, returned to Great Britain, after an absence of ten long years, a general in the army, with as many bright shillings in my purse as any of my wise and delectable neighbours, and with as warm a heart as ever. Curse it all; do you think a man's heart is to change with his climate, or because the African sun has been burning over his head, that the very instant he arrives in your torpid and uncomfortable atmosphere, it is to freeze his heart? No, Sir Jasper; I am somewhat older in years than when I saw you last, mounted on your favourite chesnut mare, with Sir Oliver, mounted on his grey one, and a parcel of blood hounds following at your heels, to enjoy the pleasures of the chase; but Hector Oldstock is still the same, not one bit the wiser, I protest; though loaded with all the imperfections, but, I thank Heaven, free from all the prejudice and infirmities of age. I am hale and hearty, and brisk and lively as a bottle of Champaigne."

"Well, and who would ever have thought it?" cried Sir Jasper, viewing the cheerful and benevolent countenance of Sir Hector with symptoms of the most profound astonishment, not perfectly free from envy, that he bore so little resemblance to the veteran soldier before him; "who would have thought to have seen you looking so well, after all the perils and hardships of so long and tedious a war; expensive enough, to be sure, it has been to all of us; and many a bright guinea has flown out of our pockets, to carry it on. But what is

more surprising to me, after all, is to see you come back again alive, when it has been reported so many times that you fell in battle. Poor Sir Oliver was very sorry, I assure you, to hear of your death."

"Was he so, Sir Jasper?" uttered Sir Hector, in so ironical a tone, and with such dry expression, that it had nearly discomposed the features of the grave Henry to immoderate laughter, which good manners alone suppressed in the presence of his patron. "Poor Sir Oliver!" again responded Sir Hector, as echoing the doleful accent of his friend; "his grief was, no doubt, immensely great at my supposed defunction from the ancient and honourable house of the Old-stocks, of which I have now the distinguished and superlative honour of being the only living representative: but how much more considerably would his brotherly affection have been excited, Sir Jasper, could he have guessed how soon I was to jump into his title and estate; that indeed was one of death's uncivil vagaries, was not it, my good Sir Jasper Wilding?"

"Very sudden, and very uncivil; but, I must needs own, a very fortunate incident for *you*, Sir Hector," answered Sir Jasper, very dryly, for he did not vastly relish the ironical pleasantry of Sir Hector's manner of addressing him.

"And almost as surprising and as unlooked-for an incident," reiterated the tormenting Sir Hector, "as your having married Betty Spinster, your old housekeeper, Sir Jasper; it was as fortunate for her to become Lady Wilding, as for me to become Sir Hector Oldstock."

"With this difference only, you will please to ob-

serve, Sir Hector," rejoined Sir Jasper, highly provoked that he should continue to play upon him, "that you were born to inherit a title, and Betty Spinster was not."

"Gad zookers! then Betty has all the merit of it," cried Sir Hector, now laughing heartily; "for curse me if I think there is any merit in being born to inherit titles, any more than in being born to inherit crowns; for the prince and the beggar, when they descend to make a part of their mother earth, are, in my mind, of equal equality. But what is the news in these parts, Sir Jasper? and how is your son and heir, Mr. Thomas Wilding? He was a fine promising youth when I quitted England, and must be greatly improved."

"As to his improvements, I know nothing about them," cried Sir Jasper; "he is tall enough, and *graceless* enough; but ill weeds *grow* apace, as the saying is, and my son Tom is one of them. Would you believe it, Sir Hector? that idle extravagant boy has made shift to squander away half my estate, in following his silly pleasures and pursuits."

"Then he must have made some rapid strides since I beheld him last," replied Sir Hector, "for your estate was pretty well stocked, Sir Jasper: but that is a good hearing; and Tom has some spirit in him, I find."

"Confound his spirit, Sir Hector," uttered Sir Jasper; "do you call it a good hearing to waste his father's property in idle extravagance? to give my money away to a parcel of beggars and *geneses*, and people of such description? It was only a few minutes ago that

I had a fellow here of that sort, whom Tom has got intimate with, somehow or other, because he writes books: but if you will believe me, Sir Hector, I could knock his brains out for so disgracing himself, for the fellow is as poor as a church mouse, and has not a shilling to bless himself with. He has occupied one of my cottages in Whitethorn Vale for upwards of six months without paying me a single halfpenny for his arrears of rent. Is not this monstrous, Sir Hector?"

To which Sir Hector, with some petulance, immediately replied,—

"It is indeed monstrous of *you*, Sir Jasper, and absurdly so, to expect that a man is to pay you money, who, from your own account, is in want of a shilling."

"Then why did he inhabit my house, Sir Hector," demanded Sir Jasper, "if he did not mean to pay for it?"

"Because, probably, he must have inhabited the woods and the wilds, had he found no other dwelling," answered Sir Hector; "and woods and wilds are the fittest habitation for beasts, and not for man. How much does this unfortunate son of the Muses owe you?"

"That is immaterial, since it is not at all likely that he will ever pay me," gruffly replied Sir Jasper.

"But I say, Sir Jasper," angrily retorted Sir Hector, "that I am of opinion that it is a very material point in question; and I again repeat, What does this man owe you?"

Sir Jasper now hemmed, and coughed, and hemmed again, before he made shift to answer,—

"Why, since you so positively wish to know, I will positively tell you, Sir Hector; it is nearly the sum of ten pounds."

"What do you call nearly?" vociferated Sir Hector, in an impatient tone.

"Nine pounds sixteen shillings and fourpence half-penny," was the instant reply of Sir Jasper Wilding. "I am exact to a nicety in these sort of matters," added he, with great solemnity.

"Oh, confound your niceties, and your exactness too," rejoined Sir Hector; "I don't want to hear any of your *nice* calculations, I promise you, more than I did twenty years ago; it was dot and carry one with you then, and it is dot and carry one with you now; and gad zookers! if I don't think it will be dot and carry one with you when you go into the next world, Sir Jasper Wilding. Well, I will undertake to pay this vast and mighty sum which has been so long owing to you by this poor unhappy devil, if you will tell me his name."

"Will you indeed, Sir Hector?" cried Sir Jasper, now exhibiting the utmost signs of satisfaction; "well, I protest that is vastly kind and obliging: but this was always your noble-minded and generous disposition; you was, I remember, always that way inclined."

"Upon my soul, if that be the case, I most heartily wish, Sir Jasper, that I could return you the compliment," cried Sir Hector, now laughing immoderately. "Well, now for the man's name."

"How very unlucky that I cannot call to mind what it is at this precise moment," said Sir Jasper; "I have a bad memory."

"What, notwithstanding all your exactness and *niceties*, Sir Jasper?" cried Sir Hector; "would that a *bad memory* were *all* that a man has bad about him; *that* we might pardon; but a bad heart is"——

Sir Jasper was deaf to this observation.

"How unlucky that Tom should be out of the way," uttered he; "Tom has got his name at his finger's end; and now I think of it, there is something lying in my counting-house which will set us to rights presently; for there is one of his books that he wrote out of his own head, as he says. I will step and fetch it in a few minutes, Sir Hector. But I know that it is a cursed odd name—a Welsh kind of a name; my son told me that he was a Welshman."

"And he is a true Cambro-Briton, I will answer for him," cried Sir Hector, at the very moment that Sir Jasper made his appearance with the author's manuscript, which having eagerly unfolded, with no small degree of impatience, he presented to Sir Hector, who read aloud the following words, which were contained in the title page:—"The Victor Vanquished; or, Triumphs of Humanity, by Edward Llewelyn."

"Llewelyn is then the name of this luckless bard," exclaimed Sir Hector. "Well, Sir Jasper, I will just step and ask my niece, Lady Primrose, for some money to pay Llewelyn's debt; after which, you will perhaps favour me with a sight of Mr. Llewelyn's book; I have the greatest anxiety to peruse the contents."

"By all means, Sir Hector, by all means; you are welcome to do that now, if you please: you may even take the book along with you to Stanmore Priory, and leave your word with me as your bond—that is sufficient."

"You shall find it so, Sir Jasper, when we meet again," uttered Sir Hector, smiling; and, depositing Mr. Llewelyn's manuscript in his pocket, he very gladly took his departure from the residence of a man every way so repellent and uncongenial to his own feelings, character, and principles; but determined on visiting him the very next day, for the express purpose of discharging, most conscientiously, the debt incurred by the unfortunate Welsh bard, with whose compositions he longed to be acquainted, and in whose misfortunes he was deeply interested, and most anxious to relieve.

"I will read the Welshman's book this very evening, to you and Flora, and the family of the Evelyns," cried Sir Hector, as he linked his arm into that of Ensign Conway, and again proceeded down the hill homewards to the Priory; at which they arrived only just in time to make some alteration in their dress for dinner. They had scarcely been seated in the drawing-room ten minutes, when Mr. Mrs. and Miss Evelyn were seen walking up the avenue. Up started Sir Hector, and away ran Flora to welcome and receive her dear, amiable, and respected friends; and the very first sentence that Sir Hector pronounced, on Mr. Evelyn approaching him, and extending his hand to meet the warm and friendly pressure of his, was,—

"Evelyn, what say you to reformation now?"

"And follies all forgot in the pleasure of the present moment of returning felicity," uttered Mr. Evelyn, and immediately walked with Sir Hector into the presence of his lovely niece.

CHAPTER XII.

"Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose
The good we oft might win,
By fearing to attempt it."

SHAKESPEARE.

DURING the time that dinner was serving up, and even before it was finally set upon the table, the whole budget of news that Flora had to communicate to her beloved friends was very quickly imparted to them. They had all the characters of both male and female personages, with a full description of the dresses, manners, and conversation of every one who had been introduced to her at the Countess of Stormond's fashionable assembly; to which Mr. Evelyn, who was in deep and earnest discourse with Sir Hector Oldstock, and his young friend Ensign Conway, had not given so attentive an ear as the ladies. The reverend gentleman had indeed something more rational to talk about than the colour of silks, the quality of laces, or the display and costume of fashionable beauty. But we must forgive the ladies for thus indulging their fa-

vourite propensities; for what can women talk about but dress, and the ornaments of their pretty persons? The men will not allow them to have souls or minds fit for any thing else; and the Turkish philosophers, of ancient memory, have absolutely gone so far as to attest, that women have *no souls at all.* Wise, crafty, sage gentlemen these! they do not recollect how many imperfections they have drawn down on their heads, sagacious as they are; for they must then surely answer for all the follies that women commit, since they have so generously taken upon themselves the whole catalogue of human indiscretions; for if women have no souls, how can they sin against Heaven or against man? Let the wisest philosopher solve that question, if he can.

"I am really delighted, my dear Flora, that you were so highly entertained, and your expectations of the amiable Countess so fully realized," exclaimed Mrs. Evelyn; "but you are too severe on the young baronet, Sir Charles Ratcliff, whose only fault appears to have been his extreme admiration of so lovely a partner."

"Oh no, that was not his *only* fault, dear Mrs. Evelyn," cried the lovely widow, with the archest simplicity; "for he kept every one else at a distance from me. If he had not been so very particular in his attentions towards me, and so tormented me to dance with him again, I should have received them from objects far more interesting and congenial to my feelings."

"Such as the Marquis of Rosalvie, or Lord Clairville, very probably, my dear Flora," rejoined Mrs.

Evelyn, with an arch smile, which immediately crimsoned the face and neck of Flora with the most eloquent blushes, which she in vain endeavoured to conceal, as with affected carelessness she replied,—

"Certainly, my dear madam, either of those gentlemen would have been far, far preferable to the conceited smiles of the silly vain baronet."

Mrs. Evelyn laughed, and Fanny laughed, and Sir Hector laughed immoderately, while he slyly asked Mrs. Evelyn, who sat upon his right hand, if he did not think the title of the Marchioness of Rosalvie a very pretty one.

"Lord, uncle, what has put that into your head?" cried the lovely widow.

To which Sir Hector jocosely replied,—

"The planets, my love; they rule over certain destinies, which no mortal power can avert, when they are once decreed; and marriages and deaths are sometimes foretold by them. Now I say that Venus is a most beautiful planet, and that Mars is"——

"Will you have the goodness to replenish your glass, Mr. Evelyn?" cried Flora, betraying the most evident confusion: "my uncle's glass is also empty; fill it again, to many returns of this happy meeting."

The widow uttered this with one of her most bewitching smiles. The planets were forgot in a moment, and so was the title that Sir Hector had been thinking would next fall to the lot of his lovely niece; for he could perceive that Cupid was beginning to play a very active part in the business already, only in the course of one single night, and what would he do hereafter? He saw, however, that Flora was particu-

larly solicitous to evade the name of this Marquis, and that made him suspect that she was particularly interested about him. Not wishing to offend her, therefore, much less to embarrass or distress the feelings of so dear an object, he immediately drank to her charming toast in a full bumper, and by way of directing the channel of discourse to a very opposite subject, related his morning visit to Sir Jasper Wilding, and the deep interest he had taken in the misfortunes of the Welsh author, producing the manuscript of Mr. Llewelyn from his pocket, which, at the earnest petition of Flora, and the request of Mr. Evelyn, was read aloud by that gentleman, in a clear and manly voice, for the amusement of the highly gratified and delighted parties, and to which they eagerly listened with the most profound and curious attention.

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
It droppeth as the gentle dews from heaven,
Upon the place beneath."

SHAKESPEARE.

"Humanity is the brightest feature that can beautify and adorn the human character; but, in the breasts of monarchs, it should be exerted with double sway, because it is often in their power to extend it even to an enemy. But it was not so with the high and mighty conqueror, the great Atalaba, who sacrificed to his resistless fury the innocent victims which war had spared: neither sex nor age escaped the general carnage which prevailed on that ever memorable day, when our English forces were defeated at the siege of Malta; whose

clear and limpid streams, on which the moon so late reflected her beauteous light, now flowed with the blood of our brave countrymen; and whose citron groves, in which nought could be heard but the sweet warbling song of the nightingale, now only sent forth the mournful cries and expiring groans of our gallant soldiers! Ah, dreadful seat of war! where many a manly bosom, pierced with a thousand wounds, lies low and disregarded amongst the heap of dust; where husband, fathers, brothers, sons, all lie mingled in the general ruin, cut off in the earliest days of youthful prime! But Heaven will always extend its mercy to those who rely on its protection, even amidst the horrors which surround a field of battle, as will be illustrated in the following pages.

"Amongst the number of our English troops, who survived the dreadful carnage at the siege of Malta, there existed but one poor soldier, called Peter Anderson, who, having escaped the enemy, lay concealed in a tent, till the break of morning discovered him, with the first ray of light, to the guards of the ferocious tyrant.

"'Let us instantly despatch him,' cried one of them, brandishing his sabre.

"'Kill him,' said another; 'by holy rood, it will be glorious sport for our royal master.'

"They were about to strike, when the third guard, from the mere thirst of avarice, interposed.

"'Hold,' uttered he; 'were it not better that we carry him alive to the palace of Atalaba? Were he dead, what shall we get by it? Not the price of our labour; but living, he is a prize to our blood-thirsty

master, and the Regent, belike, will give us booty for our pains. To the palace of Atalaba then, away with him !'

" Peter Anderson, now bound hand and foot, was dragged forth; but he remained passive in their hands, well knowing that resistance would be vain, and that nothing but the intervention of Heaven itself could snatch him from the horrors of impending death. On an order being issued from the Regent's attendants that his Highness was not to be disturbed for some hours, they conveyed their captive to the apartment on the ramparts of the eastern tower, (where all the prisoners were confined during the Regent's pleasure,) and having placed on him strong irons, of a prodigious weight, one of the guards thus tauntingly addressed him :—

" ' What art thou ?'

" ' A man,' cried Peter, ' and therefore your fellow-creature.'

" ' What is your quality ?' demanded another, surveying the brave, manly, though agonized features of Peter Anderson with strong symptoms of curiosity.

" ' A soldier,' replied he, ' and therefore your equal.'

" ' May be so,' retorted the guard; ' and yet I would not change my condition with thine; for you are'——

" ' Your prisoner,' cried Peter; ' the prisoner of war, but, I thank Heaven, not of cowardice! The same chance might have made you mine. What then? Should I forget the duties of humanity? No! when an enemy is in your power, respect the rights of a soldier, who has neither betrayed his king nor his coun-

try. I fought against your mighty chief in arms; you fought against mine. You have conquered. Is not the victory thine? Why do you wear it so ingloriously as to insult a fallen enemy? Why have you bound me in chains? I am neither a traitor to my king or my country.'

"Astonishment sealed the lips of the attendant; and the sentiments he had inspired, though free from any compassion, could not but awaken admiration, even in the breasts of the ferocious leaders.

"'Off with his chains,' cried a veteran commander, called Timour Khan; 'but report him to the Regent; he cannot escape us.' Then turning to Peter, 'What do you require of us,' said he; 'we are bound to serve, and serving we obey; we admire your courage, but cannot retract from our duty.'

"'Perform your duty, may it please you then,' cried Peter Anderson, proud of the approbation he had excited even from his bitterest foes; 'but extend humanity. I am content to be your prisoner; I do not murmur: I am a rough soldier; I do not repine at Fortune when she persecutes me. I hold my life but as a tenant to the will of Providence, and am ready to resign it to a higher commander-in-chief than stands at the head of a regiment; so please you do even as you will with Peter Anderson.'

"'Soldiers,' cried Timour Khan, who was high in the service of the Regent, 'mark you this! This is a man! *All* are not *men* who bear the outward form. Bear Peter Anderson to my tent; give him food; let him rest. If the Regent be displeased, I will myself pay the forfeit of his offence. Oh, Atalaba! great and

mighty conqueror!' cried Timour Khan, casting a look mingled with admiration and pity towards the glowing countenance of the grateful Peter; 'should thy ungovernable rage but spare this single victim of thy fury, what ages of torture will escape thee! But oh, should it not, (for thou art inconceivably cruel,) the hand that strikes the blow, by thy fell command, must perish with thee in eternal shame and infamy!'

"But not many hours was Peter Anderson suffered to remain in the situation which the humane officer had appointed him; for the dread mandate from the Regent now arrived, who, glorying with brutal triumph over the conquests he had obtained, received the news that a single captive yet remained in his power, with the most violent symptoms of satisfaction, resolving in his mind, that he should be condemned to the most cruel death

"To design and to execute at the same moment, was a rule invariable with this most inexorable tyrant; and he imperiously demanded the English soldier to appear before him, when Peter Anderson was immediately brought in by the guards, Timour Khan standing at the head.

"'What!' thundered out Atalaba, 'do I behold an English captive appear in my presence without chains? Why have my guards neglected their duty?'

"'High and mighty Regent,' cried Peter Anderson, bending at the feet of Atalaba, 'your guards *did* their duty; they loaded me with irons, and my limbs writhed with anguish under the torture: but I had been fighting for my sovereign and my country; and disgrace is not the fittest badge for a brave soldier: it touched

the heart of humanity; it moved you gallant officer to say I was not worthy to wear them: he is a soldier, and so am I; he would die for his Regent—I would die for my Sovereign. Accept my life; 'tis not worth preserving; but, oh most mighty Regent! what service will it render you?'

"The Regent was confounded; he had seldom been attacked in language such as this: it was plain truth, which rarely meets the ear of royalty; and though not subdued, he was at least amused by the novelty of sentiments which came without disguise from the lips of an English soldier.

"'By my sceptre, thou hast wit,' exclaimed Atalaba; 'but thy audacity will but increase the punishment which thou hast provoked.'

"'By what have I merited your Highness's displeasure,' cried Peter, fixing his eyes with calm composure on the hard, stubborn, and unrelenting countenance of the merciless tyrant.

"'By speaking the truth,' cried Timour Khan, boldly advancing to the footstool of the Regent: 'hadst thou told him lies, by the faith of a soldier, thou wouldest have flourished high in favour. But hear me, countrymen! Fellow-soldiers, hear me! Atalaba, slight not the warning of a faithful servant! Behold these grey hairs, silvered over with age in the service of the high and mighty emperor, thy father. Many a gallant victory have I fought, many a bold achievement have I won with the great Fernandus; and in my boyish days, he courted much my friendship. Expiring in my arms, I swore allegiance and eternal faith to *you*. Have I not kept my word?

Atalaba, has Timour Khan ever yet departed from his duty?'

"'What do you demand?' cried the Regent, whose eyes already flashed fury at this strong appeal made to his feelings by the undaunted veteran, whom he determined to sacrifice to his rage at some future period, for his intemperate zeal in the cause of humanity. 'What does Timour Khan demand?' again repeated he.

"'The life of Peter Anderson,' exclaimed the veteran; 'I beseech thee, Atalaba, to spare that honest soldier; and the noble act will reflect more lustre than the rubies which sparkle on thy diadem; thy future conquests be crowned with never-fading glory; thy throne be immortal, for it will be encircled by the brightest glow that lends its spark from heaven,—humanity! Spare that soldier, then, oh mighty chief, and Timour Khan will be thy slave! Devote him to thy wrath, and Timour Khan must be'——

"'What?' thundered out the Regent.

"'A tyrant's foe,' replied the veteran, firmly, to the astonishment of the surrounding guards, and the now highly incensed Regent; who, no longer able to conceal his anger, instantly dismissed Timour Khan from his presence, ordering him to be placed under a strong guard, in the apartment of the ramparts, till his Highness should fix on the punishment most suitable to the high offence he had committed; while Peter Anderson was loaded with an additional weight of strong irons, and confined in a dark dungeon, where he was to wait the day of his execution.

"We will now suppose that the reflections of Peter Anderson could not be of the most pleasing nature.

Confined in a dark and gloomy cell, damp and loathsome, where not so much as one ray of the blessed sun was permitted to shine on the dreariness of his solitary confinement; and while his limbs were tortured with the intolerable weight of the irons, the horrors of his situation were increased, when he reflected how unworthily the brave veteran had been treated on his account.

"'Oh! could but my life atone for the indignities which he receives,' exclaimed Peter, with a deep sigh, 'how quickly would I fly to Timour Khan, and purchase his release! But alas, I am unable to console him; I shall never more behold him; for I am condemned to die by the hand of the ruthless tyrant. Oh, what a world is this! where innocence has no redress, virtue no claims, genius no friends, and courage no reward.'

"Another deep sigh followed the soliloquy of Peter Anderson, who now began to meditate with profound love and reverence on the last, though best hope the wretched can receive in the perilous and trying hour of misfortune and adversity,—the hope and cheering solace of our Christian religion, which, even in the worst of times, can afford us consolation; in the midst of which Peter was interrupted by hearing, as he imagined, a light and soft footstep near the door of his dungeon; still nearer it approached, and Peter's heart beat high. Could it be Timour Khan? The idea was improbability itself: Timour Khan was a prisoner, and, like himself, had no chance of escape. Could it be the guards, come to prepare him for his fate? No; the footstep was too light. But his astonishment in-

creased, when presently he saw the door of his dungeon unclosed by the hand of a beautiful boy, clothed in a rich garment of purple and gold. His youthful countenance, fresh as the soft tints of the blushing rose, and fair as the unblown lily, revealed a face of such perfect beauty, that Peter, whose thoughts had long been fixed on heavenly objects, imagined for an instant that an angel had descended from the skies; and attempted to bow down before him, but was prevented by the weight of his chains.

"'Bright angel!' exclaimed Peter, 'I bow submissive to thy will.'

"But he was quickly interrupted by being addressed in a voice full of compassionate sweetness; and the beautiful youth, taking from beneath his mantle a small basket of refreshments, presented it to Peter, with the following words:—

"'Brave soldier, take this, and this, and this,' handing him refreshments, 'and make a hearty meal, that's a good fellow. Come, take comfort, for indeed, indeed, I pity you; and who knows, when to-morrow comes, but somebody may try to save you.'

"'Sweet innocent,' cried Peter, melted into tears, (for the youth appeared no more than fifteen,) 'thy lamb-like voice would but enrage instead of softening the heart of a tyrant; wert thou to plead for Peter Anderson, Atalaba would destroy thee, sweet boy.'

"'No, I am very sure the Regent would not *kill me*,' uttered the youth, blushing deeply.

"'And why so?' inquired Peter.

"'Because he is my *father*,' replied the beauteous boy; and the astonished Peter became dumb with

wonder and amazement. 'I am the prince,' continued the youth, 'and am called Henrico; the Regent has no other child but me. When I told my mother the fearful tale of yesterday, and saw our faithful officer, Timour Khan, dragged to the tower, and you in this loathsome dungeon, indeed I wept most bitterly; but my mother could not bear to see my tears, for she is kind and tender hearted.—Go, Henrico, cried she, go to the prison of Timour Khan; take him gold, and bid him be of comfort. Then haste thee to the dungeon of the poor soldier, and give him food; and to-morrow, when thy father shall decree the deaths of the brave men, do thou, my Henrico, prevent the fatal and disgraceful deed. Atalaba is your father; he has no child but thee; he will not resist the prayer of his only son. Cling to his heart, for it is thy own; bid him save the life of the soldier, and pardon Timour Khan; say that his Adelaide entreats it. Go, my boy, and may angels aid the persuasions of your tongue.—And came I not to comfort thee, honest soldier?' uttered the Prince, with an air of the most engaging sweetness; at which he beckoned the guards, ordering them to remove the heavy irons which bound the legs and feet of poor Peter. This they would have refused, but, for several reasons, thought it most prudent to comply with the request of their young Prince, who was most deservedly beloved by all ranks of people.

"'In a few hours you shall behold me again,' cried Prince Henrico; 'when the Regent, my father, shall have arisen, I will haste me to his chamber, and there follow the counsel of my mother.'

"Peter Anderson was lost in wonder, astonishment,

and admiration at the conduct of the amiable young Prince; and a gleam of hope for the first time stole over his imagination.

At length the hour arrived which was to decide the fate of the poor soldier. The Regent had issued a warrant for his execution, and the awful mandate was communicated to the prisoner, allowing only one quarter of an hour to prepare himself for the solemn occasion. It was already half expired; and the young Prince did not appear till Peter was brought before the Regent to meet his fate; to witness which, the brutal and inhuman Atalaba had Timour Khan dragged from his prison. A loud murmuring was now heard amongst the guards, and some confusion taking place, Prince Henrico appeared at the head of the populace.

"'Hail to our beloved Prince!' exclaimed the people, and an awful silence prevailed.

"'What brings my son hither?' cried the Regent; 'what is the pleasure of my darling boy?'

"'To save the life of a poor soldier,' cried the young Prince, bursting into tears. 'Oh my royal father, in pity I implore you to grant my suit; spare the life of Peter Anderson; send him back to his native country. Restore our worthy officer, Timour Khan, to your favour. Let the rights of humanity be dispensed among the people. And may my father live long to reign, and hear the nation say—Long live the Regent.'

"One universal spirit of enthusiasm animated the breasts and burst from the lips of the soldiery, and Long live the Regent, resounded from a thousand

tongues. The force of nature was triumphant, and Atalaba was wholly subdued.

" 'Soldier of England,' exclaimed he, 'you are free! Timour Khan, I restore you to the rights of which I deprived you! Soldiers, let rejoicings this night be made public; let your wives and children feast at the banquet which shall be prepared in commemoration of this day; and when the cup shall press your lip, remember Peter Anderson—the humanity of your young and virtuous Prince—and the *Victor Vanquished.*' "

In these words Mr. Evelyn concluded the interesting little tale produced from the pen of the Welsh bard, which was not only listened to with the most profound attention, but excited the sympathy and respect of every individual there present, for the distresses of the suffering, unfortunate, and ingenious author, whom Sir Hector was now determined to relieve, without the slightest doubt or apprehension existing in his mind, that such a man was worthy of his liberal support and patronage. None had listened with softer sensations of pity and compassion to the tale of poor Llewelyn than the lovely Flora, who entreated her uncle to permit her to contribute her *widow's mite*, to relieve the necessities of the author and his distressed family; and with one of her bewitching smiles, which it was scarcely possible for mortal power to resist, Flora added,—

" Now do, pray, dear uncle, let me go and bring you

some money immediately. How much will be sufficient to discharge his arrears of rent to this Sir Jasper Wilding? And after that, you know, we can give him some more. In short, I should like to go myself, and pay a visit to this Whitethorn Cottage, and look at his wife, and see his pretty little children. I love children dearly; though I have got none of my own; yet I—I"——

Flora, for some reason or other, found it a difficult matter to get to the end of her speech, and blushed deeply when she perceived that both her uncle and Mr. Evelyn were regarding her with the most scrutinizing attention. At length the former very jocosely exclaimed,—

"And *yet*, Flora, it is a very natural supposition, that your fondness for children will be *increased* rather than *diminished*, in due course of time; for, in due course of time, I expect to see you the mother of a great many."

"My gracious, uncle! *me* the mother of a great number of children! What a prophecy! Did you ever hear the like, Mr. Evelyn?" replied Flora, blushing a thousand times deeper than before.

"Your uncle Hector was always a wag, Lady Primrose," answered Mr. Evelyn, smiling; "and I protest I am of opinion that he will continue so till the end of his existence."

"Well, but that is not the point in question," resumed the lovely widow, wishing to evade the subject of her uncle's pleasantry as anxiously as possible; "I should like very much to take a walk over to this

Whitethorn Cottage this very evening. What say you, uncle, to my proposal?"

To which Sir Hector replied,—

"No, you gipsey, I will not consent to your doing any such thing till I have entered the premises myself, and am rightly informed whether they are worthy the observation of my Flora or not: neither shall you forestall me, you little hussey, in what I am going to do for this unfortunate family, though I must needs have some money of your Ladyship, to enable me to pay Sir Jasper Wilding for Llewelyn's rent; for not a stiver have I left of what I brought with me from Oldstock Hall. I gave my black devil my purse when he mounted the box at the last stage, and he has contrived to get rid of its contents, and returned it to me empty."

"I am glad to hear that, uncle," cried Flora; "for then you will certainly condescend to make me your banker, whether you like it or not; so I shall do as I please, remember, about the sum total for the Llewelyns: you must take what cash I choose to give you, or have none at all."

"So saying, Flora tripped out of the room, but returned in a few moments, and slipping a red morocco pocket book into the hands of her uncle, retired with Mrs. and Miss Evelyn, before Sir Hector had sufficient time to utter a sentence.

"Did you ever see such an extraordinary creature as this niece of mine, Evelyn?" exclaimed Sir Hector, his countenance confessing his almost idolized fondness for his lovely and amiable relative, in whose praises

Mr. Evelyn was no longer silent; and he very warmly expressed his most glowing admiration of her conduct in the present instance.

"But Flora was always the same generous warm-hearted girl as she is now," uttered Mr. Evelyn; "and riches could never have fallen to the lot of one more amiably disposed to render them serviceable to her fellow-creatures: and yet so churlish and niggardly was the temper of both her father and aunt, that I own I have endured, as well as Mrs. Evelyn, many apprehensions on Flora's account; for there is nothing so pernicious, so destructive in its effects, as the force of example, Sir Hector; and theory and precept are mere shadows, when put into competition with this dangerous reality. Alas, the very aged and the wisest sometimes follow it; how then shall the youthful and inexperienced heart escape its contagion?"

"Yet my darling has!" cried Sir Hector, exultingly; "my Flora has not been contaminated by the force of this pernicious example that you speak of, though, gad zookers! she had a rare one before her in my sister Lydia and my brother Sir Oliver: but this opposite in her disposition to theirs, Evelyn, she owes to her mother, her angelic mother, of whose mind and features she is the very counterpart."

A deep sigh followed this remark, the nature of which Mr. Evelyn was by no means unacquainted with. He had known of this fond and early attachment, formed in the boyish days of Sir Hector Oldstock, for the lovely mother of Flora, and so fatally remembered afterwards, by the young and military hero, with such deep and heart-rending regret. Mr. Evelyn

had also heard whose hand had torn them asunder; and that it had, probably, after the birth of Flora, hastened the pale and lingering consumption which soon laid this perishable and lovely flower low in the dust; for Lady Oldstock did not survive many years after she had become the wife of Sir Oliver, and since that fatal marriage had only beheld her husband's brother once, and that once was when she happened to have the infant Flora in her arms. And perhaps this first sight of his little niece made some impression on the memory of her uncle Hector, for from that very moment he cherished the strongest attachment for the lovely offspring of an adored and martyred woman, whom he fondly hoped would one day have been united to him by the dearest ties of consanguinity. All this did Mr. Evelyn know; but most delicately and cautiously did he avoid the mentioning of any circumstance which might revive in the memory of Sir Hector Oldstock the object of his early love; so that to the remark of Sir Hector, that Flora was the counterpart of her mother, Mr. Evelyn had returned no answer, which judicious silence had the happiest effect on the spirits of Sir Hector, who soon recovered his jocularity, and entered into some very pleasing and rational conversation with the worthy Rector, of whom he inquired if he had seen any thing or knew any thing of the Welsh bard, Mr. Llewelyn, since his residence in Stanmore. To which Mr. Evelyn replied,—

"I have encountered a stranger more than once in my walks, a pale and melancholy man, whose countenance reflected study and grief, too frequently the only companions of literary occupation, and literary labour.

Alas! how lamentable that it should be so, and that the truly meritorious should be the only objects marked out for misfortune, and cold unfeeling negligence. I cannot positively assert, however, that this stranger was the personage that you allude to; but never having seen such a face or figure at all resembling him in Stanmore, I conclude, from appearances, that it can be no other than your Welsh bard; and if so, he bears the marks of strong genius and character about him, too striking and extraordinary to be mistaken for a vulgar or illiterate being, without intellect, or without feeling."

"I have no doubt then of its being Llewelyn," cried Sir Hector; "modest merit, sunk low in misfortune, ever shuns the gaze of unfeeling curiosity; not ashamed of investigation, in its most private and retired actions, yet it would willingly hide its unassuming head from the finger of scorn being pointed at it because of the helpless poverty of its condition; and though gifted with talents of which monarchs might be proud to boast, it flies from the haunts of those mercenary worldlings, who would not only deride its power, but deny its existence altogether, were they able. I do not wonder, therefore, that poor Llewelyn is so little known; for even in the small village of Stanmore, he would have encountered some upstart mushrooms to have opposed the exertions of his pen: the blacksmith, probably, or the barber, would have entered the lists with him as an author. These sort of gentlemen have a tolerable good stock of impudence provided for every occasion, and would have shewn no mercy to a Welsh bard, when once they had acquired the knowledge of

his needy circumstances. All this Llewelyn was aware of, and has very wisely shunned the society of such mercenary grovelling wretches as long as he could. But at length his poverty has become known to Sir Jasper Wilding; he could not conceal it from this demon of avarice, who would sacrifice his only child to his insatiate thirst for gold and mercenary principles. By mere accident I became a listener to the conversation which passed between them. The unfortunate author pleaded his poverty, and the wretched state of his circumstances and family, as a plea for an indulgence of time to be granted to him for the discharge of his rent due to Sir Jasper Wilding."

"And surely Sir Jasper could not be insensible to such a plea, made by a father and a husband," exclaimed Mr. Evelyn; "he is a man in the most prosperous smiles of good fortune, and has never known the want of a shilling."

"Which is one ostensible reason why he feels so little for those who are in want of one," responded Sir Hector; "had he ever known the keen-blowing wind of poverty, and shrunk under its bitter blasts, he could not have insulted the feelings of the unfortunate man in the manner that he did, for the paltry consideration of only a few pounds, and for which Llewelyn deposited in his hands a sufficient security for more than the amount that he owes him—the said manuscript, which I now hold in mine; and that author's works must be poor indeed that would not satisfy the demand of ten pounds."

"And is it possible that Sir Jasper Wilding could have wounded the feelings of this respectable man

only for the sake of so paltry a sum?" cried Mr. Evelyn.

To which Sir Hector replied—

"It is not only possible, but it is *true*, friend Evelyn; Llewelyn was not only insulted, but his professional labours even doubted and called into question by this fox-hunting baronet, who married his own servant, and disgraced his own ancestors by this low connection, merely to save the expence of being married to a more respectable woman. What can you think of such a worldly-minded wretch? And mark the consequences which ensued as a just punishment for his folly and insatiate love of avarice. The low-born creature that he invested with the title of Lady Wilding, contrary to his expectations, very shortly after his misplaced union, produced him a son and heir to inherit his estate and his title, which no earthly power can deprive him of at his father's decease; and the one half of his immense property has already been deeply involved by the wanton extravagance of this son and heir, and this frugal wife. She is now dead; but it is said that her improper indulgence in the follies of her son, whom she encouraged in every idle habit of dissipation, has rendered the young man a very unfit representative to succeed to the title and fortunes of his ancestors."

"It is certainly so said, but I do not credit the assertion," cried Mr. Evelyn; "nay, I am of opinion that young Wilding, bating a few thoughtless follies which belong to youth when improperly managed, will do more credit to his armorial bearings, when he wears them, than ever his father has done before him. He

has a warm and generous disposition; and in the contributions lately made to the parish for the relief of the poor, I had the satisfaction of perceiving the name of Mr. Thomas Wilding almost the foremost on the benevolent list, and to a sum of no small amount, I can assure you; since which time I have totally disbelieved all reports to the prejudice of Sir Jasper's wild and extravagant heir."

"And so will I, so long as I have breath to draw," cried Sir Hector. "And now, Evelyn, I will tell you my plan; but I forbid you to tell Flora, on pain of my displeasure. The little gipsey won't rest till she goes in search of this poor Welshman and his distressed family: now I am equally anxious to reward suffering and unfriended merit as my darling Flora; but I wish to see how the land lies first, and whether either Flora or I may be justified in relieving them according to the nature of our liberality; that is, Flora's liberality, for curse me if I have a single stiver in my pocket that I can call my own; it is all Flora's; so I should not much like to give the dear creature's money away without precisely knowing that the objects so relieved were worthy of her bounty."

"That knowledge, I should conceive, might very easily be acquired by your taking a walk down to Whitethorn Cottage yourself," cried the Rector; "you will then have an opportunity both of seeing and conversing with Mr. Llewelyn, and judge of his merit accordingly."

"Gad zookers! why that is the very thing that I mean to do," exclaimed Sir Hector, laughing; "and I tell you, Evelyn, how we will manage it: we will send

Henry up stairs to keep the ladies in chat while they are taking their tea, which Flora knows I don't care much about, when I am sitting over my wine, and talking of my old campaigns; and in the mean time, you and I, Evelyn, will steal a sly march, and reconnoitre the military forces of the Welsh bard, at his garrison in Whitethorn Cottage. Have you any objection? Flora won't know a word of it, you know, and we can return time enough to save our bacon, and drink some of their tea beverage into the bargain."

"I have no possible objection in the world," uttered Mr. Evelyn; "indeed, I have the utmost anxiety to see the sufferings of an unfortunate and meritorious object relieved by the exertion of so much goodness and humanity."

"Goodness and humanity?" responded Sir Hector; "What goodness is there in having a full purse, if there is not also a good heart to keep it company? and what merit is there in talking of humanity, if it is not exerted in behalf of our fellow-creatures, when they stand in need of our protection? Come, Henry, quick march to encounter something less formidable than what we have lately been accustomed to the sight of;—bright eyes and pretty faces will be more agreeable than cannon balls and wounded soldiers, I warrant me. What say you, my hero?"

Henry blushed up to the ears, for the father of the lovely Fanny was before him; and never had he felt so solicitous to please, or to render his conversation and manners worthy of the approbation of the amiable Rector. With retiring diffidence, therefore, and respectfully bowing to Mr. Evelyn, as he arose to accom-

pany his patron, Henry made his exit out of the room, in order to make his appearance at the tea-table, with two of the most lovely and fascinating beings in the created universe; and certainly the temptation of being enchanted with the company of two such women was irresistible to the heart of the young soldier. The palm of undivided beauty would have been difficult to decide, if Henry had held that famed apple in his hand, which Paris, on the top of Ida, presented to Venus. For Flora was a Venus in every sense of the word; and Fanny Evelyn was a Venus too; and as Henry stole glances at her soft and placid turn of features, and her mild blue eyes, he could not help thinking that he should prefer Fanny for a wife to all the women he had ever beheld in the world. But who was to know this? Neither Fanny nor Flora had the most distant thought of what was passing in the breast of the young son of Mars; much less did Mrs. Evelyn imagine that he was so soon enamoured with the charms of her lovely daughter. But the sly little urchin cannot keep secrets, for the life of him; and he no sooner obtains a victory, than he contrives, by some means or other, to let the defeated party know of it, and feel the smart which he has inflicted. And Henry began to experience that his fetters were not light, or long to be supported with apathy or indifference.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Men are April
When they woo, December when they wed;
Maids are May, when they are maids,
But the sky changes when they are wives:
I will be more jealous over thee
Than a Barbary cock-pigeon
Over his hen."

SHAKESPEARE

SIR Hector Oldstock and his friend Mr. Evelyn were not long before they came in full view of the habitation of the Welsh bard, which, at the declivity of a sloping hill, nearly covered with primroses, rose modestly above a clump of trees, by which it was surrounded. It was a plain but neat square cottage, with a garden in the front, in which it was evident that no small pains had been bestowed on its cultivation, for every flowering shrub (many of which were just beginning to bud and half unfold their blossomed sweets) appeared to be in the highest state of perfection. But these were not the exclusive objects that, on the nearer approach of Sir Hector and Mr. Evelyn to this little ro-

mantic dwelling, attracted their attention. Two little smiling fair-haired cherubs, a boy and a girl, were playing before the door of Whitethorn Cottage, on which they turned to gaze with the most unspeakable delight and satisfaction. On an enquiry being made if their father, Mr. Llewelyn, was at home, the little girl, dropping the handful of daisies she had been gathering, replied, in a sweet lisping accent—

"No, sir; but mamma is, and so is the little baby. Poor mamma has been very sadly, and baby too. Shall I run and tell her that you want her? I shan't be long, if you will promise to stay here till I come back again."

"I will promise you any thing, my little angel," exclaimed Sir Hector, surveying the uncommon loveliness of the child, with the softest emotions of pity for the misfortunes of its unhappy and dejected parent; "but don't disturb your mother, if she is not well, I beg of you."

"But mamma is a great deal better now, sir," uttered the little girl, seemingly in great anxiety to be gone; "so I will take my brother with me in doors, for he is very little, and cannot walk very well by himself; and then I will tell mamma that you are here, and want to speak to her. Come, Charley, trot away. There, don't fall, and hurt your little hands, as you did awhile ago."

The little cherubs were out of sight in a moment, leaving Sir Hector somewhat puzzled to know in what manner he should introduce himself to Mrs. Llewelyn in the absence of her husband. He was not left many minutes to deliberate on a point which re-

quired no deliberation at all, had he considered it attentively; for his was the visit of condolence and of friendship to the suffering and the afflicted, and not that of insult and persecution; and the return of the little fair-haired girl was accompanied with Mrs. Llewelyn's compliments, begging that he would walk in!

"And I will shew you the way, if you please, sir," uttered she. "Mary, our maid, is gone away, so mamma calls me her maid now, but I am a very little one: I wish I was a great deal bigger, that I might do all mamma's work."

All this had been uttered by the lovely innocent as they proceeded round by a small gateway, at the entrance of which stood the wife of the Welsh bard, the little boy they had before seen hanging by the skirts of her plain snuff-coloured stuff dress, and an infant, apparently about six months old, was in her arms. Still, though encumbered by the weight of these precious little burthens, Mrs. Llewelyn curtseyed gracefully to Sir Hector Oldstock, modestly demanding to know if his business with Mr. Llewelyn was very urgent, and regretting that he was not then at home, but that she expected his return almost every instant.

"In the mean time have the goodness to be seated, gentlemen," uttered she, opening the door of a small apartment, in which she herself had been sitting with her infant, which she had just taken from the cradle.

"I thank you, madam; but I hope we do not intrude either on you or your little family," cried Sir Hector, seating himself with Mr. Evelyn without further ceremony. "I am indeed most anxious to see your husband, and my business is certainly of an urgent nature,

though it has nothing in it that can at all distress your feelings, or alarm your fears on his account. Believe me, that my visit to Whitethorn Cottage bodes you no harm, Mrs. Llewelyn, and that I am come hither on an errand of friendship to you and your husband. The gentleman whom I have brought with me has also the like disposition to serve you—Mr. Evelyn, the worthy Rector of this parish."

"Ah, sir! and it is not the first time that the name of Mr. Evelyn has reached my ear," cried Mrs. Llewelyn, who had now seated herself opposite to Sir Hector, with her lovely infant on her lap; "I have great reason to remember Mr. Evelyn, to whose charitable benefaction I owe a gratitude that is boundless."

"Hush, hush, my dear madam; you owe me nothing," uttered Mr. Evelyn; "it is not in my power to bestow benefactions, nor will I receive a merit which I know to belong to another. I interceded indeed for the relief which was granted to an unfortunate family, and succeeded; but I can assure you that the gift was not mine, neither had I the knowledge that yours was the family, Mrs. Llewelyn, on whom that gift was conferred."

"And what is more, Mrs. Llewelyn," cried Sir Hector, "I know more of your circumstances at this precise moment than you do yourself; and being a man of few words, and far less ceremony, I will tell you how I came to be so well acquainted with your family concerns. In the first place, madam, I have the happiness of being uncle to Lady Primrose, of Stanmore Priory."

"Then, sir, you are uncle to one of the loveliest and

most exalted beings in creation," exclaimed Mrs. Llewelyn, with fervour.

"That I believe; and there is no vanity in saying that all the world subscribes to that opinion," replied Sir Hector. "Well, Mrs. Llewelyn, I am on a visit to that dear niece of mine, from whom I have been absent for ten long years, in a foreign country, and on military duty. On my return to my native land, I found my brother, Sir Oliver Oldstock, defunct, and my niece married, and the widow of Lord Primrose. Well, so far, so good. Not long, as you may well suppose, after receiving intelligence that I so little expected, I posted away to Stanmore Priory, to see my dear Flora; and I *have* seen my dear Flora, and I am now *with* my dear Flora; and this morning I was also with a personage of your acquaintance, madam; and in consequence of seeing *him*, I am come to see *you* and your husband without further ceremony: that is the long and the short of my story."

To this speech of Sir Hector's uttered with extreme warmth, rapidity, and impatience, Mrs. Llewelyn, now blushing deeply, made the following reply:—

"You honour me most highly, sir: but permit me to inquire the name of the personage who was so kind as to interest you in the nature of our domestic griefs, and has informed you of our distressed and unhappy circumstances; for indeed, indeed, sir, my acquaintances in Stanmore are greatly limited; my friends are far distant—my connections in this country totally unknown."

"And as little desire to be known, that I will wager," cried Sir Hector; "since they already know

that you are unfortunate, and stand in need of their assistance, madam. In fact, Mrs. Llewelyn, they are the most cursed frosty-nosed, mercenary wretches that inhabit this part of the country that ever existed: you need not tell me what sort of beings you have had to deal with in Northamptonshire, after the specimen given you, in Sir Jasper Wilding, of the exceeding urbanity and liberality of their dispositions; for Sir Jasper is the man, madam, whom I visited this morning, and to whom you are indebted for my presence here."

"Sir Jasper Wilding?" exclaimed Mrs. Llewelyn, expressing the utmost surprise; "you perfectly astonish me, sir: he is our landlord, of whom we rent this cottage, and of late he has been"——

"A d——d unfeeling one," cried Sir Hector; "that, Mrs. Llewelyn, I have had a tolerable good proof of by a conversation which I was so fortunate as to overhear between him and your husband, when I by mere accident called on Sir Jasper this morning. I did not indeed either see or converse with Mr. Llewelyn; but that was by no means necessary, madam, after what I heard him disclose to Sir Jasper Wilding, to whom his arrears of rent will be immediately discharged by me: I have given my word to Sir Jasper, and I never retract from it. I hope, therefore, you will make your mind perfectly easy on the score of Sir Jasper Wilding ever importuning you again on the subject of his rent, which, if you continue to remain at Whitethorn Cottage, will henceforth be paid by me regularly, when it becomes due: and this I beg you to inform your husband when he returns home; and that if he will do me the favour of calling on me at the Priory to-mor-

row morning, I shall be exceedingly happy to obtain some conversation with him on the subject of his literary talents, which I already think highly of, and wish to be more intimately acquainted with. And now, Mrs. Llewelyn, I must instantly depart; for I have positively left Lady Primrose waiting tea for me and my friend Mr. Evelyn."

And Sir Hector immediately arose, but suddenly stopped, on Mrs. Llewelyn exclaiming, in a tone of voice scarcely articulate, from the involuntary emotions of surprize and gratitude which in one moment had so powerfully assailed her;—

"Oh, go not yet, without a mother's thanks, without a mother's blessing!" uttered she, following him, as he slowly retreated towards the door. "May Heaven reward you with every extatic joy that it can bestow."

"Dear Mrs. Llewelyn, you certainly forget that Flora's tea will be quite spoiled, and that I shall be soundly rated by my saucy niece for staying so long," cried Sir Hector, with an air of peculiar pleasantry, intending to lessen the strong emotion and deep sense of gratitude which he had excited in the bosom of this amiable female, at the same instant that he was by no means insensible himself to the consciousness of having performed a praiseworthy and benevolent action, which would contribute so greatly to the comfort and happiness of an affectionate mother, naturally anxious for her tender and helpless offspring, so long exposed to the rude breath of chilling poverty, and all its train of disagreeable appendages. And it was certainly highly gratifying and pleasant to Sir Hector's feelings,

to relieve the miseries of such a woman as Mrs. Llewelyn, and to receive her thanks; for, excepting his niece Flora, and the mother of Flora, he had never beheld so interesting and so lovely a creature as the wife of the Welsh bard. She appeared to be in her twenty-ninth year; and though sickness had somewhat paled the rose on her beauteous cheek, and sorrow had certainly made some ravages on her fine form, yet such as Mrs. Llewelyn *now* was, she might very correctly have supplied to the imagination of the poet or the artist a face and figure resembling the heroines of the celebrated Ossian; for her dark eye uttered volumes, and the luxuriance of her raven hair flowed in easy negligence over a bosom white as the downy plumage of the swan. Clad in homely habiliments of the plainest order, she yet looked lovely in this attire, and every thing around her breathed of the purest simplicity and elegance of mind and thought. Her children were little cherubs, full of smiling beauty and infantine sweetness; so fresh, and so fair, that they seemed the winged messengers of heaven, rather than of earthly mould. Sir Hector Oldstock took care, ere he departed from this humble abode of peace, love, innocence, and virtue, to leave something more behind him than mere promises, or professions of the strong interest he felt in the fate of the author's family; for, on pretence of having forgotten something, he left Mr. Evelyn on the outside of the gateway, where he had parted with Mrs. Llewelyn and her lovely children, and returned once more to bid her farewell. She was still standing at the entrance of the cottage, with her youngest child in her arms, while the elder ones had

resumed their playful sports, and were again filling their little baskets with flowers.

"Mrs. Llewelyn," uttered Sir Hector, as he made rapid strides towards her, "one of the infirmities of age is shortness of memory. I was positively charged by Lady Primrose, my niece, to present you with this little billet-doux, as a memento of her respect, for the pleasure she received in hearing the perusal of one of the compositions of a Welsh bard, just imported from his native mountains."

On these words he placed in the hands of Mrs. Llewelyn part of the contents of Flora's red morocco pocket book; but as it was wrapped up in paper, we cannot possibly guess of what it consisted, or, if money, how large was the amount; since it is very certain that Sir Hector gave no time to Mrs. Llewelyn either to return thanks for the gift of his beauteous niece, or to know what that gift was composed of; for he was out of sight in one moment, and close at the side of the worthy Rector, before Mrs. Llewelyn had sufficient time to recover from her second surprize and involuntary confusion occasioned by the unexampled generosity and benevolence of this most eccentric, and yet most compassionate of all human beings.

As he journeyed on to the Priory, some conversation passed between him and Mr. Evelyn relative to the wife of the Welsh bard.

"She is an uncommon lovely and interesting creature, I tell you again, friend Evelyn," cried Sir Hector; "and her children are cherubs; how clean, how neat, how fresh, and how fair! although they are the children of neglected poverty and unfriended genius, yet

there is no mark of a mother's negligence about them; nor have I the least doubt but Mrs. Llewelyn's connections are the most respectable, notwithstanding they may have some prejudice and pride belonging to them, and perhaps had higher views for this charming woman than seeing her the wife of a poor author."

"Very probably so," replied Mr. Evelyn; "but I am of opinion, that if there were not poor authors, there would be no authorship worthy of the press for any considerable length of time. There are, indeed, titled authors, who write much in the present fashionable day, and to whom we cannot reasonably deny talent of the most shining excellence; yet boldly assert, that it is sometimes misplaced, and that were such titled authors writing for their bread in lieu of pleasure, they would not obtain, to use a vulgar phrase, 'salt to season their porridge,' because they have not adopted subjects which will always meet with toleration, much less the encouragement of the public at large. It seems, indeed, as if nature had placed talents within us that we are ignorant of, and which the passions only can produce, and often in a more finished state than art could ever accomplish."

"Yes, surely, Evelyn," cried Sir Hector, as they now came in sight of the beautiful walls of Stanmore Priory; "there is an elevation not depending upon fortune only—a distinguishing appearance, which seems wholly destined for great actions—a self esteem, which steals, as it were, imperceptibly upon its possessor, and usurps the deference and respect of other men, and which often rises above birth, dignities, or even merit."

Mr. Evelyn could but acknowledge the truth of the observation; and by this time they had arrived at the gates of the Priory, through which they entered as privately and as silently as they had gone out before; and immediately making their appearance in the drawing-room, apologized to the ladies for their long absence from the tea table, by setting forth a plain, round, and unvarnished tale of where they had been, and the cause of their detention: in short, Sir Hector delighted Flora with the description he gave of Mrs. Llewelyn and the lovely children, which was seconded by the warmest praises of Mr. Evelyn.

"Well, but it was barbarous of you to go without me, uncle," exclaimed Flora; "and you, Mr. Evelyn, to encourage Sir Hector Oldstock in such incorrigible rudeness. I protest I don't know how to pardon the deception you have both been guilty of; nay, Mr. Henry Conway; I must rate you too, for I assure you that I do not consider even *you* wholly blameless in this affair."

"Why, what the devil had Henry Conway to do with the business?" cried Sir Hector, highly amused with the blushes and embarrassed looks of poor Henry, who, actually believing that the lovely widow was really offended with him, stammered out a sort of apology, to atone for the unwarrantable liberty he had taken with her by having informed her Ladyship that Sir Hector and Mr. Evelyn were sitting over their wine, when he knew that they had set out to find the residence of the Welsh bard.

"Well, but I knew that you were not telling me the truth, Mr. Conway," cried Flora, laughing; "nay, I

observed to Miss Evelyn, that I thought you could not tell a lie with a good grace; didn't I, Fanny?"

The fair transparent cheek of Fanny was suffused with a brighter tint of crimson than was at all usual in in her delicate complexion, in replying to her lively friend's arch interrogation.

"Yes, I recollect that your Ladyship said something of the kind respecting Mr. Conway; but you were less severe on the embarrassment which the young gentleman then betrayed than what you are *now*, Lady Primrose."

"Indeed, Miss Evelyn?" cried Flora, so archly, and with so peculiar an accent, that not only Sir Hector, but even Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn indulged in a most hearty fit of laughter against poor Fanny and the young soldier, who, exulting that he had obtained so lovely an advocate to plead in his behalf, sat silently watching and observing with the most rapturous delight the transitions which were so rapidly passing in the lovely and expressive features of the amiable Fanny, who, timid and half afraid that she had uttered more in favour of him to her lively friend than prudence or propriety warranted, in the presence of her father and her mother, shrunk with modest and retiring bashfulness even from herself. But neither Mr. nor Mrs. Evelyn were displeased with their charming daughter; she had uttered nothing but in the purest simplicity of nature: while Sir Hector was enchanted with the native ingenuousness of the lovely girl; and Flora secretly delighted with the growing *penchant* that her amiable young friend was beginning to discover for the modest merits of her uncle's protegée, for whom she was well

aware that he intended amply to provide, when his affairs should be properly arranged: and if her uncle did not provide for him, Flora was predetermined in her own mind that she would, since he was likely to become the favourite of her beloved Fanny; for what would not Flora do for the child of her dear Mrs. Evelyn, whom she regarded in the light of her best and dearest maternal friend! And how greatly had the hand of almighty Providence put that in her power! she could serve all her friends, she could benefit her fellow-creatures, without in the slightest degree injuring her own interest; for she had more wealth than she could appropriate to her own uses, let them be ever so wild or extravagant: and Flora was moderate; she was generous and open hearted; but in her own wishes she was humble, and neither bold nor aspiring but to do good. She had an undoubted claim to the greatest part of her father's property, if she chose to make a demand of it on her uncle, being the only child of the deceased Sir Oliver; and Sir Hector had told her as much on his first arrival at the Priory, when they were conversing alone together; to which Flora had spiritedly replied—

"Me, uncle, make a claim on the property of my father? Never! I disdain a thought so mercenary, when I do not want it; and if I did, I would not touch a shilling of it but on condition that you and my aunt Lydia should share it with me. Yes, I should consider it only a part of my duty to give the sister of my father something to save her from being considered an object of bounty or dependance; though I will grant that my aunt has not merited so delicate a mark of my

attention, and, I fear, cherishes but little affection for her niece: yet I would wave that thought, on reflection that she is considerably advanced in years, and subject to the weakness and infirmities of age, which I, being young, should pity rather than condemn."

It was not without a glistening eye that Sir Hector listened to the sentiments of his angelic niece; and, folding her to his breast with the most undisguised warmth, he rapturously exclaimed—

"Generous, exalted, heroic girl! you have indeed taught me an example, which were I not to follow, would stamp me the veriest wretch in nature. It is indeed true that my sister Lydia has but little claim to either your affection or mine: to me she has never been a sister, nor to your helpless youthful years did she ever supply to you the care of an aunt. She has but little right to imagine that we should regard her personal happiness, who never once bestowed a thought, or evinced one generous action for the security of ours. And yet, my love, you remark is just; Lydia is getting old; and, gad zookers! age has not improved her temper, or strengthened her constitution: she is decaying fast into 'second childishness and mere oblivion,' as the immortal poet says. I will, therefore, my Flora, settle an annuity on her as soon as I return to Oldstock Hall; and the rest of the property, after my decease, shall go to your children, save a moiety which I shall reserve for poor Henry Conway."

"For my children, my dear uncle?" cried Flora, bursting into a most immoderate fit of laughter; "surely you are now dreaming of improbabilities, not

of possibilities, or any thing that is ever likely to happen."

"And why not likely to happen, pray, Flora?" cried Sir Hector; "Is it not a very likely matter that you will marry again? and when married, is there any thing more likely than that you will have children? For my own part, I should wish nothing better, before I bid the world good night, than to see a few pictures of my sweet smiling Flora in miniature."

"Bid the world good night, uncle?" repeated Flora, but it was not with her usual vivacity that this sentence was pronounced by Flora; the colour on her blooming cheek had faded to a pale tint, and the tear of sensibility moistened her lovely eyes. "Bid the world good night, dearest uncle?" again repeated she; "ah! when you bid the world good night, may your eyes open to a bright celestial morning, to skies serene and pure, without a thought, without a wish that is not fully realized, where sorrow never yet found an entrance, and where deep corroding care never intrudes; where every joy is made perfect, and hope, not like the hope of this world, is no longer delusive or visionary! Ah! when you bid the world good night, uncle, may this be your lot!"

"And that too of my Flora!" piously ejaculated Sir Hector, now softened into tears by the soul-subduing witchery and eloquence of his angelic niece.

This was the private conversation which passed between Sir Hector Oldstock and the lovely widow, but for whose generous intercession in behalf of the mercenary Lydia, no provision had certainly been made: yet it was the intention of Flora to settle an annuity

on her aunt, provided her uncle evinced no inclination so to do with the property of her father, to which she positively refused to put in the slightest claim.

Thus was this lovely, youthful, and exemplary creature always studying the happiness and the comforts of others, for which she was amply and sufficiently rewarded by the consciousness of having performed her duty. It was no wonder then that peace was the inhabitant of her gentle heart, and that it stamped its image on every lovely feature; for where virtue dwells, peace *is*: the world may torment, and evil-minded beings endeavour to undermine our repose, but it can never eventually deprive of this most enviable and sweetest of all sensations.

After an evening passed in the most delightful intercourse of rational society with her so truly valued and beloved friends, Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn, and the amiable Fanny, Flora arose, on the ensuing morning, in the happiest temperature of mind and spirits imaginable, which we believe were in no small degree exhilarated by a card being sent by the Countess of Stormond and her lovely daughters, with the kindest inquiry after her health, and that of Sir Hector Oldstock, intimating, that if not intrusive, her Ladyship, with Lady Sophia and Lady Emmeline, would do themselves the pleasure of taking a ride over to Stanmore Priory, in order to have the inexpressible happiness of welcoming Sir Hector Oldstock to his native country. And no sooner had Flora bade good morning to her uncle, than with a deep and rosy blush she exclaimed—

"There, uncle, is a card from the Countess of Stormond; she is positively coming to the Priory on pur-

pose to see you; and Lady Sophia and Lady Emmeline too. Now, Mr. Conway, pray take care of your heart," added Flora, with a sly look directed towards the young soldier; "for you will encounter two of the most lovely girls you ever beheld, in the accomplished daughters of the Countess of Stormond."

"Oh, I will wager that Henry's heart is by this time lodged in perfect security," cried Sir Hector, laughing immoderately at the arch witchery of his lovely niece, and the embarrassed, not to say sheepish looks of poor Henry; "there is no danger of its deserting the fair citadel in which it now reposes, is there, Harry?"

"Though I cannot possibly tell in what citadel you imagine that my heart reposes, Sir Hector," replied Henry, "yet I would certainly never turn deserter; were I conscious that it was once stationary, it would be fixed, unalterably fixed, to the first shrine to which it offered up its vows."

"Bravo, Harry!" cried Sir Hector, viewing his young favourite with the most unspeakable delight and satisfaction; "such sentiments do credit to the heart of a man and a soldier; for I will hold it incontestibly true, that he who deserts a lovely woman, after having secured the possession of her affections, is unworthy of the name of man, let him be whoever he will, and deserves to be branded with the reproach of his fellow men as long as he shall continue to sojourn in this world's earthly space, without he makes instant reparation, by offering to the deserted victim of his perfidious and apostate vows the only atonement he can make—his hand and fortune. Well, Flora, and so you think that the

Countess of Stormond is actually coming to the Priory on purpose to see me."

To which Flora replied—

"I do indeed, uncle, and therefore I must lay an embargo on you not to steal a march upon me in the same way as you did last night; I would not for the world have you offer any slight to the amiable Countess."

"Gad zookers! nor I either," cried Sir Hector; "but what are we to do with the Welsh bard, whom I have appointed to come to the Priory this very morning? I have no inclination to slight Llewelyn any more than I have your fair and fashionable friend; nay, of the two, I don't know but I should fix upon the Countess rather than a poor and unfortunate man, on whom I have just been conferring a benefit, because his feelings, under those circumstances, would be more deeply wounded by it."

"But perhaps he may not come just exactly while Lady Stormond is here," cried Flora; "and if he does, Mr. Conway will have the goodness to entertain him in the adjoining apartment till you are able to join him. Won't you be so obliging, Mr. Conway?"

"Your Ladyship has only to impose your commands on Henry Conway, and he will be proud to obey them," uttered the young soldier, bowing gracefully.

"Well, that is pretty tolerable for a young beginner, is not it, uncle?" cried Flora.

To which Sir Hector, highly pleased with this compliment to his lovely niece, answered smilingly—

"Yes, I must needs own that Harry improves since he has been enlisted under the banners of a certain commanding officer, that does more execution in half an hour, than all the artillery in a whole regiment put together."

Henry crimsoned, and Flora laughed; yet it was very perceptible that the young widow, in spite of all her raillery, was at moments grave, and certainly evinced more anxiety and impatience for the arrival of the Countess of Stormond than occasion warranted. Flora had been solicitous on this morning too, more than any other, in consulting her toilet: not that she appeared more dressed than usual, but the ornaments she wore were exceedingly becoming and appropriate to her complexion; her little mob gipsey cap, giving an air of the most perfect *naiveté* and simplicity to her bewitching style of countenance, which made her look enchantingly lovely: and when she again made her appearance in the room, Sir Hector could not avoid observing that she had made some alteration in her attire which was extremely advantageous to her pretty person, and that she was very anxious that he should not be absent when the Countess should arrive, for which Sir Hector could in no way account. But though he could not penetrate into this mystery, we can; for it was very easy to perceive that Flora expected to see somebody else at the Priory that morning besides the Countess of Stormond and her daughters; and she wished her uncle to see that somebody as well as herself. But Flora was doomed to experience a disappointment; for when the carriage of her Ladyship drew up to the gates, it contained no other

personages than the Countess and the young ladies, who were immediately ushered up to the drawing-room, and received at the entrance by Flora with the most cordial and flattering welcome, when a particular introduction took place between the parties. The Countess was considerably affected by the sight of Sir Hector Oldstock; and Sir Hector used every effort in his power to banish unpleasing and melancholy retrospection from the mind of a tender and affectionate mother; while Flora equally diverted the attention of the young ladies, particularly the sweet Emmeline, whose lovely eyes were moistened with the tear of sensibility at the mention of her beloved brother; and even the sprightly Sophia underwent some change in the brilliant colour of her complexion. At length composure succeeded, more general topics of conversation ensued, and the amiable Countess gradually recovered her serenity.

"Oh, my dear Lady Primrose, I am charged with a most particular message to you."

"From whom, may I beg to be informed, your Ladyship?" uttered Flora, with cheeks crimsoned with the most roseate blushes of confusion, which caught the observation of the whole party.

"Why, your Ladyship is perfectly alarmed," cried Lady Sophia; "it was not from your most passionate admirer, Sir Charles Ratcliff, that mamma was so particularly charged with a message to you, I assure you!"

"No indeed, my love; it was from one more sincerely devoted to your happiness and welfare than the mere professor only of a few idle and unmeaning

compliments," uttered the Countess, in a peculiarly serious tone; and Flora blushed deeper than before: "it was from the venerable dowager Duchess of Pemberton, with whom you are a prodigious favourite, that I am charged with most particular remembrances," cried Lady Stormond, "and to hope that your Ladyship will sometimes do her the honour of thinking of her."

To which Flora, greatly recovering her self-possession, replied—

"It is scarcely possible to forget so amiable a personage as the dowager Countess of Pemberton; and my memory is not one of the most treacherous. Have the goodness to bear, in return, my duty to her Grace, your Ladyship, and that I am proud of the approbation with which she so greatly honours me."

CHAPTER XIV.

"But thou, oh hope, with eyes so fair,
What was thy delighted measure?
Still it whispered promised pleasure,
And bade the lovely scenes at distance hail."

COLLINS.

THERE is not a doubt but the communication of the Countess of Stormond had given Flora the most unspeakable satisfaction; and that she retained a place in the memory of so amiable and exalted a personage as the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, was highly flattering and grateful to her feelings, while it reflected the most charming and brilliant hues on her blooming complexion, and sparkled in eyes that wanted no additional lustre to set them off; and almost had Flora, in the excess of the pleasing sensations she enjoyed, added—'And why did not her Grace honour me with a visit this morning as well as your Ladyship?' But Flora very reasonably suppressed this anxious inquiry, which at this precise moment would have betrayed a secret which she was by no means willing to disclose,

not even to her beloved uncle, and of which she herself was hardly conscious of the nature. But Sir Hector Oldstock, though of all created beings the least prone to suspicion, was not, on this occasion, without discernment to account for the unusual flutter of spirits into which the lovely widow was thrown by the intelligence of the Countess respecting her venerable favourite, well assured that Flora's predilection for this amiable personage was extended also to her relative, the Marquis of Rosalvie, as well as herself; and his anxiety and impatience to behold the man who had inspired his lovely niece with so favourable an impression towards him, every moment became stronger; and that he would see him very shortly, whether Flora liked it or not, he had predetermined in his own mind, before the Countess took her departure from the Priory: he was rejoiced, therefore, to hear her Ladyship exclaim aside to Flora—

"But you positively *must* appoint a day, my dear Lady Primrose."

"Yes, indeed you must," softly whispered the sweet Emmeline; "the dear old Duchess will be so disappointed if you do not; she made mamma promise to bring you along with her the very first visit we paid to the round tower."

"The round tower, Lady Emmeline?" cried Flora; "what a singular appellation."

"Singular enough," replied Lady Sophia, a little sarcastically; "though you will scarcely be surprized at that, when I inform your Ladyship it is that no less singular, extraordinary, and eccentric being, the Marquis of Rosalvie, who has given to the dowager's beau-

tiful and romantic retreat that frightful and abominable name. I protest it is quite ridiculous, and if I were the Duchess, I would not indulge him in such odious caprices."

"Fie, Sophia!" cried the amiable Countess, while Flora blushed deeply, and remained quite silent to the severe observation which this sarcastic young lady made upon the unhappy Rosalvie. "Fie, Sophia! if you were the Duchess, you would do as the Duchess does; and then I am convinced that your conduct would be most praiseworthy and commendable; and as to Ormond's caprices, pray do not call them by so harsh a name; he has no faults save those alone which lean to virtue's side."

"But I thought, mamma, that virtue had no faults at all," cried the saucy Sophia, with so easy and intolerable an air of *nonchalence*, that, in spite of gravity, it produced a laugh from Sir Hector, and he exclaimed, with his usual jocularity—

"Yes, but it has, though, and some of its faults leave us cursedly in the dark, whether virtue has any thing at all to do with them. But a truce to morality; I want to talk of something else than either the faults or virtues of humanity. Countess, I shall pay you a visit very shortly."

To which her Ladyship smilingly answered—

"The sooner you do me that distinguished honour, the better, Sir Hector: I shall be proud and happy to have the pleasure of being favoured with your company at Stormond Lodge, also the young gentleman to whom you have introduced me as your adopted son."

The timid Henry bowed to so flattering a compli-

ment from so exalted and amiable a personage; while Sir Hector exclaimed, at the same instant that he bestowed looks of the warmest approbation on the young soldier—

"And I am well persuaded, Lady Stormond, that I have bestowed that appellation on one who never will disgrace me; and gad zookers! since my niece has given me no sons to father, and I am an old batchelor, and have none to father of my own, what must I needs do, but become a father to one who has been my companion through many a weary march and perilous campaign, and who, though young, is old in the service of his sovereign and his country?"

Although this compliment was conveyed in rough, or rather blunt language, yet it penetrated the heart of Ensign Conway with the deepest gratitude towards his generous and warm-hearted patron, and he could not avoid involuntarily exclaiming—

"Your eulogium, Sir Hector, on the humble merits of a poor young soldier, whom your goodness and humanity fostered with your protection, reflects a lustre on your name, which monarchs might be proud to boast; because you have conferred benefits on one whom you are well assured has no power of returning it through the medium of self-interest. Alas! I am the child of poverty and of rugged war, which has given me but little chance of acquiring worldly knowledge or worldly independence, in both of which I confess myself a bankrupt."

"But it has given you independence of mind and character, has not it?" cried Sir Hector; "and that is more than either worldly knowledge or worldly

wealth could do, with all its boasted power or its mercenary attractions: for the one would teach you nothing but to look with an eye of jealousy and suspicion on your fellow-creatures; and the other would make you too fond of its false and pernicious pleasures, its idle follies, and its fascinating spells and allurements. Believe me, Harry, that the man of wealth is far less enviable than the man of humble poverty, because he has greater temptations thrown in his way, and less inclination to resist them, while the advantages which are given him over his fellow men require him the more strictly to perform the duties of humanity; for remember, that where much is given, much is required and expected by the bountiful Creator, from whom all blessings ebb and flow, at his suprome administration; —that if we do not make a right use and proper application of the blessings he bestows, whether in talent or in fortune, we shall be called to a severe account for the omission hereafter;—and that it were better, far better, never to have enjoyed them, than to have perverted the purposes for which they were designed. Let this reflection content thee, Harry, for being the son of poverty, as thou termest it, lest having been otherwise, thou hadst been less happy and less virtuous."

"Sir, it were the vilest ingratitude in me not to be content with the dispensations of Almighty Providence," uttered Henry, with involuntary warmth and feeling, "since it has already given me more blessings than I had any exclusive right to share."

A pause ensued, during which, however, several whispers had been exchanged between Lady Emme-

line and the lovely widow, but of what nature we cannot disclose, as the cheeks of Flora had assumed a tint of a more lively red, when the Countess arose to take her departure; and the latter uttered, as she cordially shook the hand of the charming hostess of Stanmore Priory, and smilingly extended the other to Sir Hector at the same moment—

"Well, *ma chere amie!* I shall expect the strict performance of your promise at the earliest opportunity; and *you*, Sir Hector, must not be kept a prisoner within the walls of Stanmore Priory; although you have so much temptation to become the captive of so sweet and lovely a conqueror, yet you must march to the word of my command as far as Stormond Lodge as soon as possible, and without asking leave of absence from your general officer in the Primrose regiment. Come, when will you enlist under the banners of Julia Stormond, pray?"

"Gad zookers! who can resist so forcible an attack?" cried Sir Hector, pressing the fair hand which had been extended towards him with so much affability and good humoured sweetness to his lips, with marks of the most respectful deference; "who can resist, I say, when joined with such powerful allies as beauty, fascination, and goodness? Not Hector Oldstock. By all that is beautiful under the sun, and all that is celestial above it, I have not the power, Lady Stormond, or the inclination, to oppose your Ladyship's commands."

"You will, then, name a day on which I may have the unspeakable happiness of seeing you and Lady Primrose, and Ensign Conway, at Stormond Lodge?"

cried the Countess, with some anxiety depicted in her countenance; "perhaps to-morrow, or the day following, or"——

The Countess paused, and looked archly in the face of Flora, who, blushing deeply, uttered—

"Come, uncle, since Lady Stormond has given me no voice in this arrangement, be pleased to appoint the day when we shall have the pleasure of paying a friendly visit to her Ladyship. Shall it be to-morrow, uncle?"

"Zounds! here is a coaxing gipsey," cried Sir Hector, laughing, as he gazed fondly on his lovely niece, who had made this interrogatory with the most bewitching and playful sweetness. "Why, then, to-morrow let it be, Countess, if you please; but you may thank Flora for it. I intended to set out for Oldstock Hall, to arrange some domestic business with my sister Lydia, and return in a few days to the Priory, bringing the old girl along with me to see her saucy niece; but, gad zookers! I am like to have no will of my own, with so many syrens about me as your Ladyship, your beautiful daughters, and that little arch devil, Flora."

So saying, Sir Hector very gallantly conducted the Countess to her carriage, which had now drawn up to the door, while the young ladies became the care of the young soldier, on whose lovely faces and attractive figures, aided too by all the powerful auxiliaries of art and fashion, Henry had certainly gazed, and not without admiration, particularly on the sweet and unassuming Lady Emmeline. But Henry had gazed with different sensations on Fanny Evelyn, though less critically beautiful than Lady Sophia Russel, and infi-

nitely less adorned in her dress and person. But what were these advantages over Fanny in the estimation of Henry? What were blandishments such as these in the eyes of true, chaste, and honourable affection? Alas! no more than a painted or gilded butterfly did Henry behold them; and though Lady Sophia, when he handed her into the carriage, condescended to bestow a smile on the young son of Mars, which vanity might have construed into looks highly expressive of her Ladyship's warm approbation of the military hero, yet Henry felt himself by no means elated or exalted by it, one smile from Fanny Evelyn being worth millions from any other individual in the whole created universe.

What the youthful Emmeline had so softly whispered in the ear of Flora, we cannot surmise; but the sound of the *Round Tower* was very distinct, and so was the name of *Rosalvie*, and both had a charmed sound, it would appear, to the lovely widow, for they absolutely kindled a brighter glow on her fair transparent cheek than summer suns that tint the leaves of blushing roses; and it was evident to perceive that her spirits had also received an additional zest for youthful sprightliness and jocund vivacity, on hearing her uncle give his consent to avail himself of the invitation given him by the amiable Countess of Stormond; and she laughed prodigiously, when Sir Hector, turning to Henry when they were again seated, exclaimed—

"Well, Harry, how stands your heart now that you have seen beauty, fashion, and exalted birth all blended together in the two lovely daughters of the Countess of Stormond?"

To which the young soldier ingenuously replied—

"My heart, Sir Hector, stands just where it did before; it has not revolted a single pace from the stationary planet by whose influence it is directed, and under whose government it must remain, although I admit that the attraction has been great."

"Better and better," cried Sir Hector, heartily laughing, and winking at Flora; "you improve rapidly, young man, under the influence of this said planet; and very potent seem to be its effects upon your constitution. Gad zookers! a Bengal sun would not have produced these effects in twenty years to come. What say you, Flora, to Harry's philosophical studies on the beauties of nature?"

"And can you think, uncle, that philosophy has any thing to do with the business?" cried Flora. "Now tell me ingenuously, Mr. Conway, if your late researches have been so very profound."

The young soldier blushed deeply; and, to add to his embarrassment, Sir Hector roared out—

"No, curse me if he has studied any more than Fanny Evelyn; and he has found her the pleasantest book of philosophy in the world; have not you, Hal?"

"Sir, I really—I protest that I—I—I—am—incompetent to answer that question," at length stammered out Henry, to the great amusement both of Flora and Sir Hector.

How long they would have continued to torment him, we know not, had not the name of Mr. Llewelyn been announced, who was of course immediately admitted.

"Had I not better retire, uncle?" cried Flora, half

rising from her chair, and yet anxiously wishing to obtain a sight of the Welsh bard.

To which Sir Hector replied, in a dignified tone—

"Why should you retire, my love? Remain where you are, if you please; the presence of Lady Primrose can never be intrusive, unless you are apprehensive of hearing your own fair image praised and exalted even to the very skies, which may probably be the case, as by this time Llewelyn is no stranger to the name of his benefactress."

"Indeed I did not mean that he should know that," cried Flora; "I intended that the presentation of the little gift to relieve his necessities should have been derived from your humanity, and not mine, my dear uncle; for well I know the liberality and kindness of your disposition, and that it would have been exerted to the fullest extent: had *I* been without the means of contributing to Llewelyn's distressed situation, I know that my uncle would have found a way to have paid the rent of this unfortunate man."

"Yes, gad zookers!" cried Sir Hector, "there you have judged rightly, my pretty Flora; I should have posted down to Oldstock Hall, in the first place, and when arrived there, I should have made no scruple of applying to my sister Liddy for the money; and woe be to her, if she had refused me; she should never have had a copper off the Oldstock estate as long as I lived, I promise her."

"Hush, my dear uncle," cried Flora, laughing, "Mr. Llewelyn is here."

Sir Hector arose from his seat, so did Flora and Ensign Conway, at the entrance of this unfortunate

stranger, from whose respectable appearance and dignified deportment, and elegantly polished manners, it was not in the power of poverty to rob a single grace; for he bowed with the air of a perfect gentleman as he approached Lady Primrose, while he exclaimed—

"I know not in what language to express my thanks to your Ladyship, nor to you, Sir Hector Oldstock, for the noble and unexampled proof of liberality and goodness you have evinced towards an unfortunate man and his suffering and helpless offspring. Alas! they must have perished in a few days, but for your timely aid and benevolent assistance, for which may holy angels reward and eternally bless you!"

"I beg, Mr. Llewelyn, that you will instantly be pleased to be seated," uttered the lovely widow, with a smile of the most fascinating sweetness, "and that you will not again think it necessary to repeat the trifling service I have been so fortunate as to render you, and which has, I assure you, afforded me the most heartfelt pleasure; I am therefore *your* debtor, and not you *mine*."

"Nor has it given me less pleasure and satisfaction than it has done my niece; so we will say no more about it, Mr. Llewelyn, if you please," cried Sir Hector, now slightly introducing him to Ensign Conway, to whom the Welsh bard bowed most respectfully; "but let us inquire after the health of your lovely wife and your pretty little ones. Zounds! I encountered one of the sweetest cherubs of a little girl I have seen since my niece Flora here was about the same age; and the other two darlings are boys, Mrs. Llewelyn tells me. Well, they are altogether a charming little

brood of chickens; and the chickens shall be provided for, Mr. Llewelyn; never shall they again be exposed to the brutality of your unfeeling landlord, Sir Jasper Wilding, you may depend upon it."

"Sir Hector Oldstock," exclaimed Llewelyn, now nearly subdued to tears by the excess of his feelings, "for what have I merited such unlooked-for, such exalted goodness? The prayers of my wife, of my children, shall be daily offered up at the throne of mercy, that Heaven may shower down its choicest blessings on the heads of their generous benefactors"——

"Come, I will positively hear no more of this, or you will much offend me, Mr. Llewelyn," cried Sir Hector: "I want to talk about the works you have been at so much trouble to compose for the benefit of mankind, and for which you have been so ill rewarded."

"Alas! Sir Hector, it is the badge of my profession," uttered the Welsh bard, heaving a mournful sigh expressive of his feelings, "to be neglected and despised by the very venders who enrich themselves at the expence of our literary labours, and yet are so ungenerous as never to own that there is any merit attached to them."

"But that must be a confounded lie," cried Sir Hector, warmed with the injuries that the ingenious bard had sustained, and the contempt which had been thrown on his writings; "for the sale of your works, Mr. Llewelyn, is at once a decided and incontestible proof of their merit, which they cannot deny; for, did they not meet the approbation of the public, they must

be well aware that they would not sell at all: and yet they have not the audacity to contradict the truth of an assertion which all the world knows besides, have they, Mr. Llewelyn?"

To which Llewelyn replied—

"That, Sir Hector, I should be content to bear, well knowing that they could not depreciate my works, which have received so kind a reception from my very best friends, the public at large; but it is the price they set upon literary labours of which I complain, and the little respect which these men pay to literary professors, whether male or female, that excites my indignation and contempt. I had indeed cherished hopes," continued the Welsh bard, "that my persevering industry, and patient forbearance with the manifold insults I have received from my publishers, or rather my employers, might have given me some claim to their pity and humanity. When the bitter blast of poverty had sunk me down to the lowest depths of despair, and ruin had encompassed my house and family—when my wife, respectable, virtuous, and lovely, was stretched on the bed of sickness, and my tender infants nearly perishing for the want of a mother's care—I applied for a small pecuniary loan, to supply the common necessities only of nature, to some of my employers, in whose service the very best of my talents had been exerted in composing a work of considerable length and difficulty, and which had succeeded with them beyond their most sanguine expectations: but they were deaf to my supplications, and inhumanly rejected my petition. My wife is dying! uttered I, in the wildest and most frantic despair, and my children

perishing! 'We cannot help it, Mr. Llewelyn,' replied they; 'times are hard, and money scarce; we have paid you for what you did for us, and cannot possibly grant you any further assistance.' 'Charity begins at home,' cried another; and with these words I was dismissed, Sir Hector."

"Yes, yes, I know the proverb," cried Sir Hector, "and it is a cursed bad one; it ought never to be repeated by any man who calls himself a Christian. And were these fellows husbands and fathers, Llewelyn?"

"I blush to say that they were *both*," answered the Welsh bard, "and professed also to be Christians and religious men."

"They did, did they?" exclaimed Sir Hector; "confound such religion, if it only teaches them that charity should be extended no where but at home. Would that such flinty-hearted mongrels were all sent over to the other side of the water to learn better manners. But come, we will waste no more time in talking of them, for I do not consider them worth even powder and shot, much less for a son of the muses to trouble himself about. I will get you better employment in future, Mr. Llewelyn, than in a time-serving capacity to such a set of unmannerly, mercenary knaves. Come, let us walk over to Sir Jasper Wilding, and settle with him for your arrears of rent for Whitethorn Cottage; after which, I will tie him down to certain terms, which if he is not willing to comply with, you shall no longer continue to remain his tenant, for I will then provide you with another residence immediately. But previous to our waiting on this old Hunks, have

the goodness to resolve me one question, Mr. Llewelyn; you have seen young Wilding, have not you?"

To which the bard replied, with undisguised warmth and feeling—

"Yes, Sir Hector, I have had the honour of beholding Mr. Thomas Wilding more than once at Whitethorn Cottage; and a finer spirited and more liberal hearted young gentleman, in my opinion, does not breathe the breath of life. He very delicately hinted at the unfortunate circumstances in which I was placed, deplored his total inability to relieve my distresses according to the impulse of his own inclination, owing to the extreme parsimony of his father, and lamented that he possessed no influence over the mind of Sir Jasper to induce him to shew the smallest lenity towards me. 'But all that I can do, Mr. Llewelyn,' uttered he, 'be assured that I will exert to the utmost extent of my power. I am, it is true, wholly dependent at present on the will of Sir Jasper, and dare not act contrary to his commands; yet I have still a trifle to bestow on the really meritorious and suffering objects which happen to fall in my way, without consulting Sir Jasper's inclinations at all in the business: he allows me something, and he imagines that I apply it to the wildest and most extravagant purposes; but it is not so, Mr. Llewelyn, for I call Heaven to witness that I have husbanded my little store for the highest gratification that the pleasures of this life can afford me—the pleasure of relieving and contributing to the wants and the sufferings of my fellow-creatures.' With these words, Sir Hector, Mr. Thomas Wilding left on

my table the sum of twenty pounds, and instantly departed. I leave you to judge what were my reflections on the conduct of this noble and exalted young man, but for whose humanity, at the time he afforded this seasonable relief, my wife had perished on a bed of sickness, for the want of proper nourishment, and my children had too soon experienced the loss of a mother's care. He is now at Oxford, completing the finish of his education; and to his absence I owe the severity and unprovoked insult which I yesterday morning received from Sir Jasper Wilding: had his amiable son been present, he would not have heard the unfeeling taunts with which I was upbraided for the nature of my professional labours with apathy or indifference."

"Very probably not," cried Sir Hector, "though his intercession with his worldly-minded father would have had, it is equally probable, but little avail."

Sir Hector had now arisen from his chair, and the Welsh bard was preparing to follow him, when Flora pressed him not only to take some refreshment, but sweetly added—

"I shall expect you to return with my uncle, Mr. Llewelyn, and favour us with your company to-day at Stanmore Priory. Uncle, promise that you will bring Mr. Llewelyn back with you to dinner?"

"Why so I will, if he will come with me," cried Sir Hector. "What say you, Llewelyn, to my niece's invitation?"

"Ah, Sir Hector, what can I say?" exclaimed the Welsh bard, penetrated to the soul by the delicate marks of distinguished favour which was on every side

heaped upon him; "my heart is too full to say half what I could wish."

"Yet your eye speaks volumes, and that is sufficient," cried Sir Hector; "there is a sincere heartfelt gratitude, that does more than pay the debt it has received—it confers an obligation; and it is one of my maxims, Llewelyn, never to judge of a man's merits by his abilities, but by the use he makes of them."

On these words, after taking some slight refreshment which was brought in, the gentlemen, accompanied by Ensign Conway, whom Sir Hector thought proper to take as a witness to any contract made between him and Sir Jasper Wilding, departed for Thrifty Manor, leaving her Ladyship to retire to dress, and to meditations of no unpleasing nature; for what Lady Emmeline had so slyly communicated to the ear of the lovely widow, was precisely that the Marquis of Rosalvie had been particularly anxious to know of the state of her Ladyship's health, and had called twice at Stormond Lodge, in the hope of hearing from her mother some tidings of her charming guest, and whether she had suffered much fatigue from her exertion the evening before.

"And I assure you, Lady Primrose," whispered the youthful Emmeline, "that this was an extraordinary effort for the Marquis of Rosalvie to make, about one whom he had never seen but once; he never seemed half so interested about the health of any Lady who has ever visited us before, though he has been present at many of our public nights: but I don't wonder at it in the least, I am sure, for who that has seen you once could ever forget you?"

"You are a little flatterer," responded Flora, in the same under tone, but so deeply blushing at the consciousness of the pleasure she received at Lady Emmeline's sudden and unexpected intelligence, that the lovely girl, who wanted neither discernment nor sensibility, was at no loss to guess from what cause those beautiful blushes had tinted so deeply the face of the young widow.

When Flora was alone, her thoughts had imperceptibly strayed to what the pretty Emmeline had repeated to her; and whether she was pleased or angry at the interest which she had excited in the breast of this extraordinary young nobleman, we will leave our gentle readers to surmise. Still Flora thought there was a strange contrariety in the disposition of the Marquis, which she was unable to define, till she was able to form a more conclusive evidence of his merits; for to what could she owe this extraordinary interest he had taken about her health or her character, since it was certain that he had taken but little pains to be informed of either, when in the gay assembly rooms of the Countess of Stormond? And it was equally certain that he had viewed her with looks, not only of apathy and cold indifference, but of apparent contempt and aversion, when she had first made her entrance there with Sir Charles Ratcliff; and that he had continued those looks towards her during the whole of the evening, and till the very moment that, in handing her to her carriage, he was about to take his leave of her; then, for an instant, the expression of his countenance had suddenly changed, and his eyes were illumined with kindness as he bade her adieu; nay, he had even

so far departed from his usual manner as to request that she would be careful of catching cold. This alteration in the Marquis of Rosalvie was so extraordinary, that Flora could not help contemplating it with some wonder and surprise, in which it was, however, very probable that displeasure had very little share. Perhaps too the Marquis of Rosalvie, with the venerable dowager Duchess of Pemberton, would be of the party the ensuing day at the Countess of Stormond's, and then she should see more of him, and converse with him more familiarly. Perhaps he would converse with her uncle, and perhaps the result would be, that her uncle would think proper to invite him to Stanmore Priory. In short, Flora had thought of so many probabilities and possibilities in this case, that she had quite forgot that time was stealing rapidly on towards the hour for dinner, and that she was not yet attired by her little waiting maid, Mistress Rachel, who had been standing opposite to her Ladyship for a full quarter of an hour, demanding to know what dress her Ladyship would like to put on, but without receiving the slightest answer from her lady to an interrogatory which she was always in the habit of replying to almost instantly. At length Flora, looking at her watch, blushed deeply, and turning towards her patient Abigail, with a smile on her countenance, exclaimed—

"My gracious, Rachel! what have I been thinking of?"

To which Rachel, half laughing, replied—

"I am sure, my Lady, I cannot tell, unless it was on one of the prettiest things imaginable."

"And what is that, pray, Rachel?" cried Flora, now beginning to prepare for the toilet.

"Your Ladyship will be angry, if a body was to speak the truth," answered Rachel, slyly and significantly, as she glanced her eyes on the wedding ring that glistened on Flora's delicate finger.

"Angry with you, and for speaking the truth, you foolish wench you?" uttered Flora, arranging her beautiful dark tresses with unaffected negligence around her fair and open forehead; "when did you ever know me to be displeased with you for uttering the language of sincerity? It is flattery only that I condemn and despise. What was you going to say, pray?"

"I was going to say, my Lady, that a husband is a very pretty thing," cried Rachel, colouring up to the ears.

"Lord! do you call that a pretty thing?" said Flora, unable to refrain from laughing.

To which the talkative Mistress Rachel archly replied—

"Yes, my Lady, when he is both young and handsome."

Flora coloured now as deeply as her maid, and twisting a wreathe of jessamine in her hair, bade Rachel to finish dressing her as speedily as possible, as the hour was excessively late, and she expected the return of her uncle every moment from Sir Jasper Wilding's. She did not choose to pass any comment on the impudent observation Rachel had just made, whether from design or accident she could not tell, but which she was determined to discourage immediately, lest at some future opportunity she should take the liberty of

again renewing this subject in her presence; and Rachel knew her duty better than to trangress again in the like manner. The looks of her lovely mistress had of late revealed a secret to the wary and lynx-eyed Abigail that needed no words to express its meaning; and her abstracted manner on this day, during the business of the toilet, had confirmed the already half-formed conjecture, that since the night that her lady had gone to the grand and fashionable ball at Stormond Lodge, she was no longer the same in her habitude of manners or disposition; and Rachel began to suspect that Cupid was beginning to be very busy with the young widow's heart, and that the period would not be very far distant when hymen would again transform her into a wife. How far Rachel was right in her conjectures, time, that brings about all seasons and all changes, will unfold.

CHAPTER XV.

"I should have prized thy heart, if none
Had ever had that heart but me,
If I had been the only one,
The first, the last beloved by thee.'

THE visit to Sir Jasper Wilding, at Thrifty Manor, was short, but decisive, and perfectly conclusive as to a right understanding being established between the landlord and his tenant; and after the contract was signed and sealed, and the money deposited for the arrears of rent due from the Welsh bard to the fox-hunting baronet, through the hands of Sir Hector Old-stock, a very perceptible change took place in the manners and deportment of Sir Jasper towards the object of his so late contemptuous and disdainful scorn and severe animadversions; for it was now no longer the poor, the unfriended, and pennyless author, that he had regarded with such insolent, overbearing, and supercilious looks of scorn, and whom he had deemed as wholly unworthy and beneath his attention, although his talents ranked him far above the ordinary class of

mankind: but now the temperature of the sky was changed in Llewelyn's prospects and tide of affairs; uplifted now from his low, obscure, and abject state, and desolate fortunes, by such a patron as Sir Hector Oldstock, supported too by the munificence of so splendid a protectress as the wealthy and lovely young widow of Lord Primrose, the Welsh bard presented himself in a very different point of view, on this morning, to the mercenary and worldly-minded wretch who had before insulted and despised him; and Llewelyn now gained from Sir Jasper Wilding respect, what all his talents, what all his intrinsic worth and merit could not do, when he believed him to be destitute of a friend to serve him in his necessities, and in want of the bright shining ore, which, to Sir Jasper, was brighter and far more transcendant than all the talents or genius under the created heavens. Attuning his voice, therefore, to the most abject tone of servility, and cringing down to the very ground with bows and grimaces which the consideration only of a few paltry pounds had the magic power of purchasing, he very cordially invited the gentlemen to take some refreshment after their long walk; and Sir Hector having nodded assent, in his usual blunt and unceremonious manner, some wine and biscuits were accordingly brought in, and handed round by the only domestic Thrifty Manor could now boast of—the trusty porter of the gate; except indeed one nearly half blind and decrepid old female, who had succeeded Betty Spinster, after she had become Lady Wilding, to the high and important office of being both cook and housekeeper in the service of Sir Jasper, and who, when

Betty died, was thought no unfit substitute to supply her place, being ten times more covetous, and twenty times more niggardly than even had been her predecessor.

"Will you dine, gentlemen?" added Sir Jasper, smilingly; "will you dine with an old batchelor, who, though he has no dainties provided for such goodly company, will presently sit you down to as fine a haunch of venison as ever you saw in your born days. I don't in general treat myself with such sumptuous entertainment and extravagant fare, but the venison is a present from my son Tom, and cost me nothing, as the saying is."

"But, gad zookers! it should cost you something if I staid to partake of it, I promise you, Sir Jasper," cried Sir Hector, laughing, "for I should be apt to overhaul your cellars, and to taste a bottle or two of that wine you have been hoarding up for these forty years. I have heard my brother Oliver, if I mistake not, extol it as the best commodity in your old crazy castle, save indeed Betty Spinster, who was then in the full bloom of virginity, hey, Sir Jasper?"

"And would that she had continued so, with all my heart and soul," replied Sir Jasper, dryly, for he by no means relished this allusion to Betty, which reminded him of what he deplored as the most unlucky incident of his whole life; "it would have saved me many a bright shilling, Sir Hector, had Betty remained single till she departed from this earthly state of existence."

"Why yes, you were a cursed fool to marry her," retorted Sir Hector, "for, by all accounts, Betty made

hay while the sun shone on the rich pastures of Thrifty Manor."

"Made hay?" echoed Sir Jasper, "she made the butter to melt before the sun, Sir Hector, and what is worse, she has transferred this propensity to the disposition of her son, by way of a legacy, as the only thing she could bequeath him at her decease: yes, I am grieved to say that Tom is as extravagant as his mother. But Betty is gone, and repeating old grievances is, you know, Sir Hector"——

"Folly in the extreme," replied Sir Hector; "a repetition of which can only make them the more bitter in remembrance. Notwithstanding which, I think you have as little to complain of as any man living, my old friend; you have a free and disencumbered estate of a few snug thousands per annum, with one individual, and that your only son, to claim a part of the emolument arising therefrom—a fine spirited and amiable youth, as I hear from report, and one that will never disgrace your ancestors. From fortune, therefore, Sir Jasper, you have nothing to complain of; from nature still less. But there is a cursed spirit of ingratitude in the heart of a man that will never rest satisfied, in whatsoever condition he is placed. For me, I am the happiest dog in existence, and have jumped into an estate of seven thousand a year, without either wishing or desiring it. Life too I have been as careless of, though not forgetting from whose hands I received the blessing; for if I had fallen in the battle's heat, (and many a time and oft I have faced the cannon ball with little hope, or scarce an expectation of escaping from

its furious encounter,) what then? I had no friends to lament my fall, no ties that bound me to existence, save only one, my little niece Flora, whom I left a young and tender nursling, and she was unconscious how dear she was to me, or I to her. Yet it was Flora that renewed in me the springs of life, or a wish to revisit my native land; but for her, I had fell a blighted flower on the blasted heath—no kindred ties to own me, no tear to bedew the cypress which would shadow my remains."

A pause ensued to this affecting apostrophe to his situation as a soldier. Long exiled from home, from family, and from friends, whom, as the gallant veteran truly observed, would feel little regret or sorrow, had he been numbered with the dead. And for a moment, even the stoic feelings of Sir Jasper Wilding seemed struck with the melancholy reflection that mortality is an event which not all the combined riches nor splendid pomps and vanities of earthly power can avert, or worldly sophistry prevent from pursuing its destined course; it is a national debt which even the wisest statesman must pay in common with his fellow lord, or the hireling who is dependant on his smiles. Here is no respect paid to personages, rank, or condition, however exalted, or however humble, except indeed in the mere outward form of unavailing pomp and useless pageantry and show, which to the dead can nothing benefit, and from the living scarce draws forth the sigh of sympathy, but from the wise regret that folly flies even to the graves of those it loved to hover over when breathing the breath of frail mortality.

But the interval of silence was not permitted to last

long, and indeed had once been interrupted by a deep-drawn sigh from the breast of the Welsh bard, who had not listened to the observation made by Sir Hector Oldstock without feeling considerably affected; and viewing the brave General with an expression of the most ardent respect and gratitude, he exclaimed—

"And think you that a gallant soldier's memory will cease to flourish, though in a far distant land he falls unburied on the ensanguined plain? Believe me, no; the tears of his country will moisten his remains, and the remembrance of his gallant virtues live for ever engraven on every mind, and dear to every heart that beats with feeling and with virtue."

A more than usual energy lighted up the features of the Welsh bard as he pronounced these words, nor was their influence lost on the bosom of the young and veteran soldier. They now arose to quit the mansion of Sir Jasper Wilding, the haunch of venison being no temptation with Sir Hector to induce him to forego the company of his lovely niece for merely the gratification of appetite, which could be indulged with a much more agreeable zest at Stanmore Priory, though the venison even were wanting, than at the table of a penurious miserable old miser, who grudged the cats about his household the very refuse of his cupboard, if he thought he could make any thing better of it. Civilly declining, therefore, Sir Jasper's invitation, and taking care that it should be clearly understood that Llewelyn had previously been invited by Lady Primrose to dine at the Priory, Sir Hector took his departure from Thrifty Manor; telling the fox-hunting baronet, that if he had a mind for a day's sport, he would

join him in a course any time he would send him word, and that he was not otherwise engaged; which proposal was joyfully accepted and agreed on by Sir Jasper, who felt himself highly flattered with this condescension on the part of such a personage as Sir Hector Oldstock, and that his favourite old sports were once more to be renewed, with the spirit of former times, in the pleasures of the chase; and promising that he would not fail sending to the Priory at a seasonable opportunity, he most cordially shook the hand of Sir Hector Oldstock, and bade him farewell, bestowing looks of the utmost complacency on the Welsh bard, and assuring him that he should always be particularly happy in retaining him for a tenant at Whitethorn Cottage, and hoped they would continue on terms of the utmost good will and amicability with each other. Llewelyn bowed in silence, but inwardly despised the man who could descend to flatter and cringe to one whom only a few days before he had denied a shelter in the hour of distress, but whom, now he no longer wanted his friendship or assistance, he was ready to load with favours. But such was, such is, and such ever will be the way of this world, and the Welsh bard ceased to wonder at it.

As they journeyed to the Priory, Llewelyn recounted many particulars of his history to his benevolent patron, Sir Hector Oldstock. When speaking of his beloved wife, he seemed considerably affected, informing him that he had married this lovely creature at a very early period in life, when scarcely sixteen years of age, in Carmarthen; that she was the daughter of a Welsh baronet, who was extravagantly fond of pedigree,

which he considered the sum of every thing that was great and honourable; that he had traced his, not to a character in the clouds, but to a progenitor acknowledged in the page of history, not only of his own country, but that of England; that inheriting this pride from his father, who carried it if possible still farther than he did, he lived entirely insulated from many of his respectable neighbours, because they could not produce such high testimonials of their ancestry as he could: of course his company was avoided, and sulkiness and reserve became habitual to him; and that with this settled gloom of disposition, he formed a matrimonial connection with a lady, who quitted her mortal career soon after she had given birth to one child, which was the present Mrs. Llewelyn, whom, after the death of her mother, he had placed at a boarding school, in order to be his companion, and fit her to be the mistress of that fortune he intended she should inherit at his demise. But the lovely Ellen was not permitted long to remain in calm and peaceful retirement by her austere, arbitrary, and always tyrannical father; and although her progress in every kind of female accomplishment surpassed her years, under the care of her accomplished preceptress, yet Sir Tudor removed her to the old gloomy castle, in which he had so many years immured himself in dreary and solitary exile, the more, as he imagined, to give such a turn to his daughter's education, as might bring her to that standard of female excellence, which he had fixed in his own mind, and particularly to instill into hers a proper sense of religion at an early time of life, that, to use his own words, "in mature

age the tree might be known by its fruits, and that grace might abound."

"I was at this time, Sir Hector," continued the Welsh bard, "high in favour with Sir Tudor Ap Morris, because from my literary labours I had occasionally assisted him in tracing that ancient pedigree which was the darling passion of his soul, and completely domineered over all minor ones; it was the life of his existence; and the enthusiasm with which he followed it up, joined to his constitutional pride, seemed to swallow up all other feelings and interests. At the period of his daughter's removal to the old castle at Carmarthen, Sir Tudor invited me to this ancient and gloomy dwelling of his ancestors. But it was no longer gloomy when inhabited by Ellen, who was just then closing her sixteenth year, with the beauty of an angel, tempered with all the delicate softness of the feminine character, which often made her shrink from observation, nay, even from herself. I was appointed the preceptor of this lovely creature by her father."—

Llewelyn paused for a moment, and an unusual hectic of colouring passed over his cheek in bright and transient hues. At length, with a deep suppressed sigh, he continued—

"Sir Hector, I need not remark to you, that the office which was assigned me by Sir Tudor was, of all others under the created heavens, the most difficult, tempting, and dangerous for a young man who had then scarcely numbered twenty."

"Why, gad zookers! or for a man who had numbered twice twenty," cried Sir Hector, laughing heart-

ily; "it would have been no easy matter to have kept Cupid from shooting a few random quivers from his bow: I say the thing was quite impossible; so I may imagine that your business was soon done with the pretty Ellen, as mine would have been, I am certain, had I been in your place. Zounds! I tell you that flesh and blood could not bear it; and if you were to tell me otherwise, I should think you were telling me a confounded lie. Come, own at once, that when the cursed old fool appointed you to be the preceptor of his young and lovely daughter, that"——

"That I call attesting angels to witness, that I was never so base and dishonourable a villain as to betray so sacred a trust," answered Llewelyn, with all the pride of a true Cambro-Briton mounting to his cheek at the same moment. "No, Sir Hector, I would have perished first, ere I would have harboured one thought or breathed one wish derogatory to the bright unsullied purity of the lovely Ellen. Yet I will confess that I loved her almost to idolatry."

"Why, that is exactly what I suspected," cried Sir Hector; "I suspected nothing worse of you, Llewelyn; though curse me if I would have trusted my daughter with any man under such circumstances, if he had been a very Joseph, and she a Diana, so there is the truth of it. Well, how long did you support the character of preceptor to so sweet a creature with a stoic heart?"

The arch and whimsical pleasantry with which this question was asked, produced a fit of almost involuntary laughter from even the grave Henry, nor could

Llewelyn himself help entering into the spirit of the veteran's good humoured jocularity; and he smilingly replied—

"Of a stoic heart, while in the presence of Ellen Ap Morris, I never yet could boast: no; I had been destined to breathe the anguished sigh of hopeless love, and worship the fair shrine I dared not pay my vows to for a long and weary length of time, Sir Hector, had not Ellen herself revealed the flame that burned so pure, so faithful, so mutual, in both our hearts; in maiden modesty she told me that she loved, when her stern father commanded her to wed another, or choose the alternative, if she acted in opposition to his authority—beggary in the arms of Llewelyn; for Sir Tudor long suspected that I loved his daughter, though I had never breathed a sentence of my ardent passion either to him or her; yet suspecting that I did so, he dismissed me from his service."

"What a wise father," exclaimed Sir Hector, still indulging in his propensity to laughter, "to clap a padlock on the door of the stable when the horse was taken out of it.'

On this observation, it is certain that the Welsh bard coloured deeply, and it is equally certain, that had he not been bound by the weighty ties of a pecuniary obligation to Sir Hector Oldstock, his free and independent, and at the same time let it be added, his proud spirit, (ah! why is poverty accompanied by pride?) would in some degree have resented an allusion made to a vulgar adage, which, to his fine and delicate sense of feeling, seemed coarse, and even indelicate, when uttered by a general officer in the army,

and from a man of exalted birth and education. But had Llewelyn done so, he would have done great injustice to the real feelings of the veteran soldier, who thought no more of an old adage being likely to offend the nice ear of a Welsh poet, than he would have thought of telling a man that he was a coward, who would not fight. He had passed his life in campaigns, and in the rough service of war, and was so accustomed to plain truth and undisguised warmth and feeling, that he could make use of no by ways, nor clothe his language in any but that of genuine sincerity, in reaching the recesses of the human heart, in which he himself possessed not an atom of deception. Not aware, therefore, of having uttered one expression that could possibly wound the feelings of a man whom he had been straining every point to serve, at the same instant that he perceived an unusual flush of crimson suddenly mount to the cheeks of Llewelyn, he exclaimed—.

"Well, you obtained the girl of your heart after all, Llewelyn; and, I have no doubt, by means the most honourable."

"Or I had not obtained her at all, sir," replied Llewelyn, still under the influence of the proud national spirit which is the distinguishing mark of the Welsh character. "When beggary with the man she loved, or splendour with the man whom she could not love, was the only alternative offered to Ellen by her father, her choice was fixed, and her answer decisive and unchangeable from the caprice with which her sex is so falsely charged. She gave her hand where before she had given her heart—to me—the most

precious treasure in the world, because it was accompanied with so heroic and incorruptible a mind. In making me her husband, she made me the most blessed and enviable of mankind. I have, since my marriage, it is true, been the most miserable; but it was to no fault of this matchless and incomparable woman that I owed my source of wretchedness; the blast of poverty has done it all. My poor Ellen bore it without a murmur of complaint or reproach: she has wept indeed, but the tears which bedewed those lovely eyes flowed for her children, when she beheld them suffering from want and hunger. She felt she was a mother, and the most wretched, because she had no means of supplying their necessities: she felt she was a wife, but she did not reproach the man who had made her a mother too; nor cursed she the inhuman father, who had so cruelly robbed her of every earthly comfort. That father still lives, but his demoniac habits and arbitrary principles remain unchangeable and fixed in malice and unalterable hate towards his only child. In the ancient solitary castle of Carmarthen he wears out his days, his wealth useless and unprofitable, resolving to dedicate it to the community of a body of monks, by whom he is infested and surrounded, rather than Ellen or her lovely children should share a shilling of the vast property which he has accumulated. Thrice have I implored and solicited his compassionate aid in the fell hour of misery, and thrice have I been denied. But the struggle is past, and I will sue no more to the remorseless unpitying man. Heaven has sent me friends in an hour when I least expected it; my Ellen is comforted, and my children preserved;

God make me thankful for the blessing; I shall sorrow no more!"

"And Ellen and her children shall bless the day they ever stood in need of that friend," cried Sir Hector, considerably affected, as was the young soldier, with the unsophisticated history of the Welsh bard, in whose character, independent spirit, and uncommon talents, they felt the deepest and strongest interest; and on reaching the gates of Stanmore Priory, Sir Hector cordially gave Llewelyn his hand, assuring him that the tale he had just imparted to him had excited his warmest sympathy, and that henceforth he and his lovely Ellen should be relieved from any future approaches of poverty; that their cherubic children should be amply provided for, even though their unnatural grandsire would never grant them any claim to his property, which hope, however, he was very far from relinquishing a prospect of, as Sir Tudor could not depart this life without seriously reflecting on the injustice he was committing; and would doubtless repent of the rash vow he had made, and one day or other make reparation for the injuries he had heaped on the devoted head of his beauteous daughter.

The hour was unusually beyond the time of dining when the gentlemen returned, and found the patience of Flora almost exhausted by their having staid out so long; but her good humour and vivacity very quickly returned, when her uncle made every apology that circumstances could possibly admit of, alleging that Sir Jasper Wilding had detained them at his crazy old mansion much longer than he imagined he should have had the patience to stay; that the old fox-hunter had

been particularly civil, had parted with Mr. Llewelyn on the most amicable terms, and had made the most polite inquiries after her Ladyship's health. To which Flora laughingly replied—

"I should scarcely think that Sir Jasper would have remembered the little wild romp that he used to call the Tomboy, but for one circumstance, uncle."

"And what is that, my darling?" exclaimed Sir Hector, pleased that the bewitching smile of playful vivacity had not deserted the face of Flora, though her good humour had been put to some trial.

"Why, you must know, that when I was at school at Mrs. Evelyn's, Tom Wilding used to come on public nights to take his lessons of our dancing master," cried Flora; "and he was always given to me for my partner, because we were two of the wildest little madcaps that were ever seen, and never separated without doing some mischief to one another. Tom contrived to tear my frock to pieces, and I, in revenge, used to get him put in the stocks for half an hour or so. It was on one of these nights, I well remember, that Sir Jasper and Lady Wilding, whom every body knew when she was Betty Spinster, came over to Stanmore on purpose to see Thomas dance. Their arrival was somewhat unexpected, and Tom, as usual, had been playing off some of his mischievous tricks with me; he had caught hold of the silk sash which confined my waist, and rent it in several directions, which so enraged my governess, that Tom underwent his accustomed punishment; and he was still in the stocks, when his father and mother arrived to witness his disgrace. The ridiculous fondness of Lady Wilding

for even the faults of her son, was proverbial, and she was highly displeased with the penance he endured, and not less angry with me who had occasioned it. Approaching me, with her darling Thomas by her side, she addressed me in the following polite terms:—'Marry come up, you little pert Jezebel; who are you in this *here* school as takes *sich* liberties with my little boy? I should not have thought of your *impurence*, Miss, I'll assure you; but I'll get a rod in pickle, to tickle your toby, the next time you *goes* for to offer such a *desult* to the son of Sir Jasper Wilding, I will, by *goles*, you little *wixen* you.' So saying, Betty marched off with her prodigal son, leaving me almost convulsed with laughter, and every body else in the dancing room in a complete roar; since which period, uncle, I have never beheld my little tormentor, Thomas Wilding, or any of his family."

The party now sat down to an excellent though late dinner, the lovely hostess of the mansion creating smiles of good humour, and inspiring harmony in all around her: nor were her delicate attentions to the so lately unfortunate and distressed author confined alone to the rules of good breeding and hospitality; for when Llewelyn took his departure from Stanmore Priory, he received a general invitation, with an earnest and pressing solicitation, that he would bring Mrs. Llewelyn, and even the children, along with him.

"Your Ladyship honours me most highly," cried the Welsh bard, penetrated to the heart by the deepest sense of gratitude; "my Ellen is indeed most anxious to behold her benefactress."

"And tell your Ellen that I shall steal her cherub

little girl from her, who so strongly reminds me of my niece Flora, Llewelyn," cried Sir Hector. "Gad zookers! I remember that Lady Primrose was just such another about ten years ago."

"Nay, uncle, it is nearly verging on the eleventh," cried Flora, "since I was at that happy age you described Mr. Llewelyn's little daughter."

"True, my dear," uttered Sir Hector, "time flies, but love lingers; I protest I had forgotten that you are rapidly advancing into the third year of your widowhood. Well, I am glad that the year is nearly out, and hope to see you enter the fourth in a different character, no longer Lady Primrose, but"——

Sir Hector paused, and looked full in the blushing face of Flora; for certainly there was a blush, which slyly betrayed itself in the lovely and ingenuous countenance that never wore a mask of deceit or hypocrisy. But fortunately for Flora, her uncle's attention was at this instant directed to something uttered by Llewelyn, at the moment of his departure; and very soon after, they retired to their respective chambers, to partake of that balmy and refreshing slumber which a consciousness of a day passed as it ought to be always renders deliciously sweet and tranquil. But we will not say that the slumbers of the young widow were so perfectly quiet or so profound as those of her uncle, or Ensign Conway, for she had more than thought of her engagement the following day with the Countess of Stormond, and her heart anticipated a thousand hopes and fears as to what objects she might encounter there besides; perhaps Lord Clairville and Captain Ponsonby; and perhaps the conceited and fashionable ba-

ronet, Sir Charles Ratcliff, might be there also, and pay her those attentions which she neither wanted, or felt any degree of pleasure in receiving from him. But what of these objects that she expected to meet? They neither interested her feelings or her heart; why then was that heart so exceedingly and unusually fluttered at going to the Countess of Stormond's on the following day? With the expectation of meeting some stranger guests there besides those she had adverted to? Flora could not tell, for the life of her; nor could she sleep, turn which way she would. Was the bed ill-made? or did the excessive heat of the weather prevent her from enjoying her usual quiet and gentle repose? It was something, and we will leave some of our fair readers to guess; for when Flora, after tumbling and tossing about till she was weary, at last closed her lovely eyes, she dreamt that an elegant form approached her in the humblest diffidence and submission, bending on her looks of the deepest interest and gentlest sympathy, and kindly inquiring after her health; and that melodious voice, and that elegant and manly figure, was the Marquis of Rosalvie. From visions so pleasing Flora gradually awoke, more refreshed from this short slumber than she had been the whole of the night long; and the words of the beautiful ballad,

"Yet awhile sweet sleep deceive me,"

would have been very appropriate to her thoughts, had not the entrance of her maid Rachel to her chamber very quickly put an end to her pleasing meditations, by her softly inquiring if her Ladyship was ready to

rise, and hoping that her dear lady was not indisposed.

"For do you know that your uncle, Sir Hector, and Mr. Conway, have been waiting breakfast for you above these two hours," added Rachel.

"My uncle waiting breakfast for these two hours?" cried Flora, huddling her clothes around her, and making the most possible haste to arrange her toilet; "my gracious, Rachel! how could you suffer me to be so intolerably lazy? I protest I am quite ashamed of myself?"

"Why I did not know, my Lady, exactly what to do in the business," answered Rachel, gathering up the beautiful long auburn tresses of her lovely mistress, and tucking them under the pretty mob cap in which the young widow looked so enchantingly the day before; "I thought mayhap your Ladyship could not sleep, or was dreaming of something or other so pleasant that you would not like to be disturbed; so I"——

Rachel paused, and looked at Flora, who, in spite of the utmost gravity which only a moment before she endeavoured to assume, burst into a most immoderate fit of laughter, which lasted for many minutes before she could recover herself. At length she exclaimed, while she carelessly tied a blue ribband round her waist, to confine the folds of a loose morning dress—

"Why, Rachel, you are certainly a witch; for I have been dreaming, and it was one of the sweetest dreams imaginable."

"And so I thought, my Lady," uttered Rachel, "you looked so pleased when I came into your chamber to call you; and you look so pleased now, that, mercy

me! I do really hope that all your dreams may come true."

"Rachel, I wish you would not chatter quite so fast," cried Flora, with so deep and roseate a blush on her fair cheek, that Rachel, who was the most discerning of lady's maids, was at no loss to surmise of what materials her Ladyship's pleasant and sweetest dream imaginable had been composed; and perceiving that her mistress was also in the sweetest temper imaginable, she availed herself of an opportunity of reminding her of two or three dresses which were laid aside, and that she protested she would never wear again.

"It would be a great pity if the moths should destroy such nice silk dresses, my Lady," cried Rachel, in the most coaxing accents; "and I am sure that if your Ladyship was ever to be married again, they would be quite out of fashion, for the waists are so short, and now it is all the mode to look as long waisted as one can. Now I was thinking, that with a little alteration of Miss Mary the milliner, they would exactly"——

"Fit you," cried Flora, laughing; "well, in Heaven's name, take them, Rachel, and let me have no more chattering for a twelvemonth to come; you have absolutely talked me into a fever. There, you may go down stairs, and be ready at an early hour to dress me. We dine to-day at the Countess of Stormond's."

"Well, if I did not think so, as sure as my name is Rachel," cried the cunning Abigail. "Well, my dream will come out; for if I did not dream that"——

The bird was flown; Flora was already half way down stairs, to meet her impatient uncle.

"Forgive me, dearest uncle," uttered she, with a look full of the most smiling sweetness, as she took her station by his side.

"You gipsey," vociferated Sir Hector, "were it not for that dimple at the corner of your mouth, I should be in a confounded passion with you."

But Flora laughed, and the dimple was more conspicuous than ever. Not another sentence was uttered by Sir Hector; the tea was made, and they went to breakfast immediately.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Twine not those red roses for me,
Darker and sadder my wreath must be;
Mine is of flowers unkissed by the sun,
Flowers which died as the spring begun:
Take that rose,—it is nipp'd by the blast;
That lily,—the blight has over it past;
That peach-bud,—a worm has gnaw'd it away;
Those violets,—they were cull'd yesterday:
Bind them with leaves from the dark yew tree,
Then come and offer that wreath to me."

BARRY CORNWELL.

NEITHER the animated looks of Flora, nor the sprightliness of her conversation on this morning, escaped the observation of her fond uncle; for it was certain that something had an unusual tendency to exhilarate her spirits, and that something could only be attributed to the visit she was that day going to make at the Countess of Stormond's, where it was probable that she would meet the Marquis of Rosalvie, of whom she had already said sufficient to convince Sir Hector that he was an object by no means indifferent to her, although she had only seen him once. But what right

had any mortal to censure Flora for thinking thus highly of the unfortunate and unhappy young nobleman, (for such he was represented to be,) if she thought that he merited her esteem? And surely of all other persons, her uncle was the least likely to condemn her for a sentiment so natural and becoming of her sex as the feeling compassion for the wretched. But was it compassion only that Flora felt for the Marquis of Rosalvie, or was it love? That no one had a right to inquire into, though they might guess at so probable a conclusion in so young and lovely a personage as the widow: and Sir Hector had no authority to question her on the truth of this probable conjecture; much less had he a right to find fault with her for pursuing the natural bent of her inclination. All he wished was, that it had not been quite so sudden, and that the Marquis, if he had really inspired Flora with a passion for him, had never paid his vows to any other shrine but hers; for he could not bear to think that his lovely and bewitching niece, with all her ten thousand graces, both of mind and person, should only be the secondary object of Rosalvie's regard. But how could this be remedied, under existing circumstances? and who in love ever coolly deliberated the point, whether it was proper for them to fall in love or not with that object whose perfections they were irresistibly compelled to admire and esteem? Older and wiser heads than Flora's had yielded to this all-powerful impression, even at first sight; and how could so lovely a young creature, with a heart so softly pure and tender, and a disposition so lively and animated, assume what she did not feel—the cold and frigid apathy of

age? In short, Sir Hector Oldstock adduced so many reasons, in his own mind, for his niece being under the potent influence of the little blind deity, that he determined to seek an intimate acquaintance with the Marquis of Rosalvie, should he fortunately encounter him this day at the Countess of Stormond's, and silently to watch the progress he made in the affections of the young widow; and to get possession, by some means or other, of this family secret, which Flora had but imperfectly revealed, and which had so early plunged this young nobleman into shades of such deep and profound melancholy. Sir Hector was resolved on sifting his history to the very bottom, which at present wore an air of mystery that strangely puzzled him. Besides, he hated mystery, let it come in what shape it would; and he felt impatient till that hour arrived when he could learn the habits, disposition, and character of this extraordinary phenomenon of perfection, who had excited such deep interest in the heart of Flora. No sooner, therefore, were the breakfast-things removed, than he reminded his niece of the engagement she had made to dine at Lady Stormond's, and that her Ladyship had particularly requested that she would neither make a late or a formal visit of it.

"So my love," added Sir Hector, with somewhat of an arch smile, "you had actually better go and make some preparation for your toilet, which of course, on *this occasion*, will call forth all the skill and dexterity of your waiting maid, as well as the taste of your Ladyship; for who knows how many strangers will be invited there to meet you?"

"Not many *strangers*, I should conceive, uncle,"

cried Flora, with a roseate blush; "for, if I mistake not, the Countess said something about a snug and private party, did not she?"

"Yes, but we all know what a snug and private party is at great people's houses," answered Sir Hector; "some forty or fifty, I suppose, of both sexes, of high ton and fashion, all staring one another out of countenance; but curse me if I care, I am an old soldier, and shall face them all with as much composure as if I were standing at the head of my regiment: I shall tell my old stories too, if I like it, and talk of my old campaigns with all the ease imaginable."

"And why not, uncle?" cried Flora; "is ease incompatible with fashion? I always imagined that it was one of its leading features. However, I will certainly not make my visit late to the amiable Countess; though, as to the business of the toilet, I really have no intention of devoting more time to it to-day than I did yesterday.

"Do you believe her, Henry?" cried Sir Hector, laughing.

Ensign Conway felt awkwardly embarrassed at the question; and Flora, without giving the young soldier time to reply to it, glided out of the room, leaving them to debate on that important point by themselves, and tripped up to her dressing-room, where she found Rachel employed in arranging her dresses.

"Your Ladyship will of course wear ornaments to-day," observed Rachel, laying a beautiful set of pearls on the table, but was much surprized on her mistress protesting that she should not put them on.

"Your diamonds perhaps would be preferable, or your gold chains, my Lady," uttered Rachel.

To which Flora carelessly answered—

"I shall wear neither; they were troublesome enough to me on the night of the ball: I hate to be loaded with ornaments, and never wore any but to please Lord Primrose; but now I intend to please myself, by throwing them all aside."

The waiting maid looked astonished.

"What, all of them, my Lady?" exclaimed she, with a sigh of regret that the beautiful baubles should be set such little store by, and that they did not belong to herself. "Surely you will wear something besides that plain white muslin handkerchief on your bosom. Why, I protest it won't be seen at all; when, if I had such a beautiful white neck as your Ladyship, I would take good care that nothing should hide it."

"You and I differ greatly then in our judgment, Rachel," cried Flora, and smiled; "however, as you are so importunate about my wearing something, give me my little favourite cornelian amulet in the shape of a heart, and which I prize more than any ornament I possess in the world."

The amulet was now handed to Flora, and tied round her neck by Rachel, who could not, however, help expressing some symptoms of surprize at the remark of her lovely mistress, by exclaiming—

"Lord, my Lady, to be sure you perfectly astonish me, to put such store on this little trifle, when you have both diamonds and pearls of so much value."

"But I do not value them half so much as this one

little heart, I can assure you, Rachel," cried Flora, but not without involuntary blushes in one moment crimsoning her fair face; and the curiosity of the wily Abigail was on the utmost stretch to know why the amulet was so prized, and she artfully added, though with an incredulous smile—

"Why, that's very true, my Lady, we don't prize one thing as much as one does another. I remember I had a sweetheart once, and he gave me many fine presents; but I minded them no more than nothing, because for why, my Lady, I had another sweetheart that I liked much better, and if he had given me but a brass thimble, I should have set a greater store by it than all the fine things of the other. Now I don't mean to say, my Lady, that this is the case with your little heart, but"——

Rachel paused, and another blush, deeper than the former, marked the cheek of Flora, who was by this time completely arrayed in a robe of the purest white, which, if it had received any addition of ornament besides the exquisitely beautiful form it adorned, would have been deprived of its sweetest charm, which was simplicity and grace. Perfectly abashed that the little amulet was nearly on the eve of betraying a very important discovery to her curious and talkative Abigail, she hastily drew on a pair of white kid gloves, and throwing a transparent white lace veil carelessly over her shoulders, she desired Rachel, as she descended to the drawing-room, where Sir Hector and Ensign Conway most anxiously awaited her coming, to order the carriage to be in attendance immediately.

Sir Hector had certainly expected to have seen Flora

most sumptuously attired, and that she would have been at no small pains to have decorated her pretty person in the most finished and splendid style that was possible; and for which he would very readily have pardoned his lovely niece, without imputing to her the vanity of her sex. But when Sir Hector cast his eyes on Flora, as she made her entrance into the room, and perceived the plainness of her dress, and that she was without a single ornament on her snowy bosom, save the little cornelian heart which had been given her by Lord Primrose, he could scarcely refrain from expressing his wonder and astonishment, or from inquiring into the cause of so singular a whim; because every body else at the Countess of Stormond's would be attired in splendid elegance but Flora; and he was apprehensive that it would be esteemed ridiculous in one whose exalted rank and brilliant prospects gave her an exclusive right to move in the fashionable hemisphere, as one of its brightest luminaries. In short, Sir Hector did not altogether like the effect of Flora's simple dress, although she really looked so transcendantly lovely in it; and after their being seated for a few moments in the carriage, he dryly exclaimed—

"Well, my love, though I have not the slightest doubt of your being esteemed the most lovely woman at the Countess of Stormond's to-day, yet I have great doubts of your being thought the best dressed lady in the room. Why, I protest, Flora, you have muffled yourself up as if you were advancing on the verge of fifty; my sister Liddy could scarcely exhibit a greater appearance of studied formality than you do now; and if it was not for that very pretty face of thine, nobody

would imagine that you were Lady Primrose, of Stanmore Priory."

"My dear uncle, it is all your own fault that my dress does not meet your approbation," cried Flora, with a bewitching smile; "don't you remember telling me that I should expend more time to-day on my toilet than on any other occasion, and I persisted in saying that I should not? I have kept my word, uncle, on purpose to teaze you: besides, I really have an almost unconquerable aversion to any extraordinary exertion in dressing; my late dear lord knew that, and, on most occasions, permitted the indulgence of my inclination: and will not you, after this candid honest confession, grant me a similar indulgence? Besides, this dress is really becoming; and though I wear no ornaments with it, it is nevertheless perfectly suited to the fashion of the day."

"And, with all possible deference to the opinion of Sir Hector Oldstock," uttered Henry, who had been, for the last ten minutes, attentively surveying the exquisitely bewitching form of the young widow, "I never saw your Ladyship in a more becoming attire than the one you now wear, or one more simply elegant, in which, if you do not think me too presuming, I do not at all hesitate to pronounce, you look a thousand times more beautiful than you appeared in the ornamental one that your Ladyship went to the ball in."

"Bravo, Hal! then I *must* give in," cried Sir Hector, pleased with the compliment that his young favourite had paid to his lovely niece; "gad zookers! I must turn about again, and quick march, for you have

mustered all your forces, I perceive, and brought up your allies before I had time to make good a retreat; and here we are in sight of the garrison; there is no shifting of quarters now, you know, I must therefore remain stationary."

"Then victory is mine, under the banners of Lady Primrose," exclaimed Ensign Conway; and the carriage immediately drew up to the gates of Stormond Lodge. At the very instant of its arrival there, it was rapidly followed by another splendid equipage, with superb liveries; and there was some confusion at the gate, before they could alight at the mansion of Lady Stormond. Both the window glasses of this splendid vehicle were hastily drawn down when it came in contact with the carriage of Lady Primrose, and one of the most melodious voices that was possible to belong to the male kind desired the coachman to stop till her Ladyship's carriage had preceded theirs through the gates of the Lodge. The order was instinctively obeyed; but the sound of the voice had thrilled to the heart of Flora; and while Henry and her uncle were employed in observing the splendour of the equipage, and the beauty of the four cream-coloured horses that drew it along, Flora was taking a sly peep at the other side of them, to try if she could obtain a sight of the fine form and handsome features which belonged to that voice that so sweetly stole upon her ear and penetrated her heart; for it was no other than the Marquis of Rosalvie's voice that she heard; and this, at a moment when she so little expected it, crimsoned her face with blushes, and created a delightful flutter of spirits. When they alighted at the entrance of the grand por-

tico, she beheld the Marquis's carriage rapidly advancing, and in a few moments he would be in the same room with her; not daring, therefore, to hazard another glance that would expose her to the slightest observation, she linked her arm in that of her uncle's as they ascended the staircase which led to the entrance of the drawing-room, at the door of which stood the amiable Countess, to welcome the approach of her visitants. She extended her fair hand to Sir Hector, while Lady Emmeline Russel gently laid an embargo on the still lovelier one of Flora's, as she led her to Lady Sophia, who was in deep and earnest conversation with two gentlemen whose backs were towards the door; and at the moment that the name of Lady Primrose was softly repeated by the gentle voice of the pretty Emmeline, they turned round to offer their most respectful salutations to the lovely widow in the persons of the Earl of Clairville and the Honourable Captain Ponsonby. When Sir Hector and the young soldier made their appearance, a moment afterwards, a general introduction took place on all sides, the amiable Countess, with that easy and polished elegance for which she was so universally remarked, presenting the veteran hero and his protegée to all her friends, with a smile of the sweetest condescension. The entrance of the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, with the Marquis of Rosalvie, completed the whole of the party who were this day invited to dine at Stormond Lodge. Of course it was necessary that a second introduction should take place with these personages and the Marquis, and his venerable relative. The former very gracefully bowed to Flora, and the latter very warmly expressed the

pleasure she felt in beholding her again; and they were both particularly introduced to Sir Hector Oldstock by the Countess, as the friend of her late unfortunate and so greatly lamented son. Sir Hector bowed to the congratulations he received, and the cordial glances which were bestowed upon him by these exalted personages; and when the ceremony of a first introduction between the parties had subsided, the most agreeable and interesting topics of conversation ensued, in which the Marquis appeared in an entire new light to his highly delighted and gratified surrounding friends, by displaying a brilliancy of wit and vivacity in his remarks, with a countenance so perfectly free from the slightest tincture of his habitual gloom and despondency, that Sir Hector, who had listened to him with peculiar symptoms of satisfaction, was astonished to find the Marquis so different a character from what Flora had represented, while she herself could not account for the extraordinary and certainly not unpleasing change that she beheld; for though she was seated between the lovely Emmeline and the Duchess of Pemberton, with the Earl of Clairville leaning over the back of her chair, and was in deep and earnest conversation with all of them, yet she could not avoid now and then returning a glance which was more than once directed towards her by the Marquis of Rosalvie; and it was very probable that glance betrayed an involuntary confusion on both sides, and that Rosalvie, whatever efforts he made to conceal it even from himself, much more from the observation of the surrounding party, did not experience the most pleasurable sensations on beholding Lord Clairville so stationary beside the young

widow, with whose attractive loveliness this amiable and accomplished nobleman (for such Lord Clairville confessedly was) was charmed, and was as unable to conceal his admiration of her as poor Sir Charles Ratcliff had been on the night of the ball, and which it was very evident that he took but little pains to conceal, because his Lordship, in the first place, was in every respect of equality with Lady Primrose; and his rank and fortune being as unexceptionable as his moral character was admired and esteemed, he felt that he had a right to address the young and lovely widow, if he thought proper, without being deemed by Sir Hector Oldstock as an object unworthy to be a suitor for the fair hand of his lovely niece. But the truth was, that Sir Hector was so engrossed by the conversation, and pleased with the amusing anecdotes related to him by the Marquis of Rosalvie, that he paid very little attention to any other personage there present. The Duchess of Pemberton, however, with whose manners he was equally fascinated, had several times an opportunity of conversing with him, and of noticing, in the most condescending manner that was possible, the young soldier, who, abashed in the presence of such exalted personages, felt the utmost diffidence in taking any active part in conversation; but this diffidence was kindly relieved by the attentions he received, not only from the young ladies, but from the amiable Countess herself. Henry was therefore stationed at last between Captain Ponsonby and Lady Sophia Russel, when they sat down to dinner, which was served up with the most splendid elegance at a quarter before

six, and with all the delicacies that the season could afford, on a service of the most magnificent china.

Sir Hector had the distinguished honour of being seated on the right hand of the amiable lady of the mansion, and the Duchess of Pemberton on the left. Next to her Grace was our lovely widow; and beside her, the Earl of Clairville, who was most devoutly attentive to her on the slightest occasion. But, from some cause, Flora was neither in her usual spirits, nor was she ambitious of receiving those attentions from this distinguished nobleman which any other female would have been proud to share; for exactly opposite to Flora was the Marquis of Rosalvie, and, by mere accident, the pretty Emmeline occupied a place beside him; and to her the Marquis wholly directed his attentions, when he was not conversing with Sir Hector, who secretly begun to surmise that this lovely and interesting young creature was the object of Rosalvie's particular preference, and that poor Flora had but little chance of obtaining an empire over the heart of this accomplished young nobleman. And how could Sir Hector form any other conclusion? for he had not heard the Marquis address one sentence to his lovely niece since the cold and civil inquiry he had made after her health on their first entrance into the room, and though there had been many opportunities, he had not yet seen the Marquis once approach her; and what was worse, he scarcely deigned to look at her, though she was seated so exactly opposite to him. The effects of this *nonchalence*, whether real or affected, (for men are as guilty of affectation as women,) were too mor-

tifying to Flora not to be fully intelligent in her beautiful countenance, which was one moment suddenly flushed with crimson, and in the next, pale as the lily. These appearances, in the object he so completely idolized, were alarming to her fond uncle, and actually made him tremble for the happiness of his darling niece. He wished she had never seen this fascinating and elegant young man, (for he was both even in the eyes of Sir Hector,) or seeing him, he had been wholly attracted by her. Fearful too that the mortification of Flora would be observed, he knew not of what pretext to avail himself to fly to her side, and whisper something in her ear to call forth her usual brilliancy of spirits; for that Flora was depressed, he was certain, by her cold and negligent replies to the Earl of Clairville, who was absolutely regarding her with enthusiasm. In short, Sir Hector very soon partook of the inquietude which seemed to have taken possession of the dejected Flora, and was not sorry when the hour of departure arrived. Not that her dejection had been remarked by any one; nay, she even smiled at the rhapsodies of Lord Clairville, and the lively sallies of the sprightly Ponsonby, while Lady Sophia often engaged her in the most amusing conversation. Emmeline, too, by no means deserted her mother's lovely guest; and Flora blushed as, leaving the seat she had occupied by Rosalvie, she approached her, playfully exclaiming—

"Have you missed any thing since you came here, dear Lady Primrose?"

"Not that I know of, Lady Emmeline," replied Flora gravely, and, spite of her usual sweetness of dis-

position, feeling angry with the lovely artless girl for asking her such a question.

"Ah, but I know better," cried lady Emmeline, whispering in a still lower voice, and laughing.

"I protest that I do not understand you, Lady Emmeline," answered Flora, with still more gravity, which only increased the propensity to mirth in the youthful Emmeline.

"Then I will try to make you understand me," rejoined she; "you had a sprig of myrtle in your bosom not an hour ago, when we arose from the supper table, but it is now gone,—look at the place it has deserted."

Flora now perceived that she had lost the myrtle, but knew not how; and feeling some symptoms of curiosity at the arch looks of the pretty Emmeline, she carelessly replied—

"True, it is gone, but it is not of the slightest consequence."

"Yes, but it is though," rejoined Lady Emmeline; "for I will swear to the theft being committed by no other than the Marquis of Rosalvie himself: he has your sprig of myrtle, dear Lady Primrose, which having strayed from your bosom, I beheld him place in his own; so slyly too, that I protest I cannot help laughing at the manner he possessed himself of it. Do you remember when you leaned over the back of mamma's chair, to answer a question of the dowager?"

"Yes, and my veil got entangled, some how or other, with her Grace's chain, to which her watch was suspended. I remember, Lady Emmeline; and it is probable that at this moment I lost my myrtle."

To which the laughing girl replied, though in the softest whisper imaginable—

"Yes, your Ladyship, as surely as it is probable that somebody has lost something else of greater value. Your myrtle fell by mamma's feet, and the Marquis, fixing his eyes on it, instantly sprung from his seat, and on pretence of saying something to mamma, dropped his pocket handkerchief on the myrtle branch, and put both into his pocket at the same moment. Was not the Marquis very sly in the business, your Ladyship? But he did not think that I was observing him all the while, and that I afterwards saw him take the myrtle, and place it in his breast. There is not so much as a leaf to be seen of it, to be sure, and the bloom is somewhat diminished, yet I have no doubt but he will prize it far beyond the most fragrant flower, because it was your bosom that gave it a shelter."

The sensations of Flora, on this little incident being so accurately related by the artless Emmeline, may better be imagined than described; and blushing deeply, on perceiving that the eyes of Rosalvie were now fixed on her and the lovely girl, she softly exclaimed—

"It is somewhat singular indeed, Lady Emmeline, that his Lordship should exhibit a specimen of so bad a taste."

"What, for admiring you, Lady Primrose?" cried Emmeline, with an arch smile; "and for holding that in estimation, nay, in absolute adoration, which had once been yours? Oh, my heavens! your Ladyship is the first, I believe, who would ever think him singular for that; and—and—and—I don't think you are much displeased with poor Rosalvie for taking a fancy to

your myrtle, and smuggling it into his bosom so fervently as I beheld him, after all, Lady Primrose; you don't look very angry; indeed, that which I have just imparted to you has called forth an additional lustre in your eyes, and a more roseate colour on your cheek."

"Oh fie, Lady Emmeline," cried Flora, blushing still more deeply at a remark so just; "who has taught you to be so profound an examiner of the human countenance, which is not always an index of the human heart?"

To which the lovely girl replied, with an evidently suppressed sigh—

"So I have been told, Lady Primrose; and indeed, young and inexperienced as I am in a knowledge of mankind, I have sometimes found it to be so: but you can never persuade me that I can ever be so mistaken in the expression of yours, which nature has stamped with such lovely ingenuousness; what I have told you about the Marquis and your sprig of myrtle has given you pleasure, real and undisguised pleasure, and you cannot deny the assertion. Though pray pardon me, I beseech you, if, by this declaration of mine, I am so unfortunate as to incur, in any degree, your Ladyship's displeasure; I would not intentionally offend you for the world."

"You have not, you cannot offend me, my sweet girl," cried Flora, charmed with the innocent simplicity and ingenuousness of that amiable and interesting young creature, at the same moment that she felt conscious with what pleasurable sensations she had listened to the account given her by Emmeline of the Marquis and her myrtle; which incident, trifling as it

appeared, made it impossible to suppose that she was the object either of dislike or indifference to Rosalvie; and if she was not, that he must have the most extraordinary motives for adopting a conduct towards her so mysterious, and, at the same moment, so unjust; nay, there was a species of cruelty in it, as well as a sort of coquetry, which, exalted as her opinion was of the merits, and glowing as her admiration was of this accomplished young nobleman, she could not reconcile to her nice and delicate sense of honour; for her own kind and generous disposition would have revolted at the slightest action of giving pain to one for whom she cherished any sentiment of friendship or regard. She was unable to account, therefore, for this defect of character in the Marquis, and was deliberating in what manner she should now speak of him to her uncle, when the Earl of Clairville, who had been engaged for the last half hour in arguing a point with his friend Ponsonby, and to which Sir Hector, Henry, and even the Marquis, had been listening with the most curious attention, again approached Flora and her youthful companion, after exclaiming to Rosalvie, as he passed him—

"It is in vain to argue any point with Ponsonby, while he speaks so partially—

"True," answered the Marquis, "we should divest ourselves of prejudice on the merits of the favoured or disfavoured party, when we would demand an opinion of the world at large on any distinguished character; but after that is given, every man has then certainly an undoubted right to think for himself, and maintain his own opinion, let it be good, bad, or indifferent."

The contended point was, whether Elizabeth, queen of England, or Mary, Queen of Scotland, her lovely but unfortunate rival, had most failings, most talents, or most virtues; and Ponsonby had given his opinion of Elizabeth, while Lord Clairville defended the rights of the beautiful ill-fated Mary; and both gentlemen had certainly displayed great ability in the powerful argument they endeavoured to support, but they grew warmer as they entered into the spirit of contradiction, and their cause consequently was losing ground. Ponsonby persisted that Mary had no virtues—that she had all failings—that her talents were all deceptive ones—and even her beauty dangerous and seductive. Lord Clairville asserted the very opposite to his friend, and declared that it was his avowed and confident opinion, that Elizabeth was a cruel, arbitrary, revengeful, and envious woman; and that, with all her boasted wisdom, he would prove, by the most incontestable historical facts, that both her heart was wicked, and her judgment weak. Warmer words and further controversy ensued; and at length Sir Hector Oldstock and the Marquis were alternately applied to, to give their opinions, and decide the debate. To which Sir Hector jocosely replied—

"No gentlemen, there you will excuse me, for I cannot positively do any such thing in the presence of so many fair ladies, to whom, were I in your place, I should leave the decision. I have always found that woman is the best judge of her own sex; and there is a lady here present able to contend that point with you, were it twenty times more difficult than that which the spirit of your debate has now made it; and

with your permission, we will now call upon the dowager Duchess of Pemberton to favour us with her sentiments on the points in question. This was received with shouts of approbation; and the venerable lady, bowing to the compliment of the veteran soldier, addressed them in the following manner.

CHAPTER XVII.

"A crimson blush her beauteous face o'erspread,
Varying her cheeks by turns with white and red;
The driving colours, never at a stay,
Run here and there, and flush, and fade away:
Delightful change! Thus Indian ivory shews,
Which with the bordering paint of purple glows,
Or lilies damask'd by the neighbouring rose."

DRYDEN.

"YOU have designated to me not only a difficult but an inexpressibly painful task, my good friends," cried the venerable dowager Duchess of Pemberton, surveying her curious and impatient auditors with a cool and placid smile, blended with an expression of much sweetness and benignity; "because it is always painful and repellant to my nature to speak ill of my own sex. To you male creatures I don't mind what I say; for I am sure, if I speak the truth, I cannot say much in favour of even the very best of you; you are all a set of incorrigible animals, and I no more believe that you were intended to be lords of the creation than I am."

The Duchess paused only while she took a pinch of

snuff from her gold snuff-box, which was not only most curiously wrought with diamonds, but actually represented a fine portraiture of the lovely and unfortunate Mary Queen of Scots in the centre of it. But it was only a short interval of silence which prevailed, for the Duchess again commenced her attack in the following manner:—

"I have said," uttered she, "that I do not like to speak ill of women, being a woman myself, and being also sufficiently aware that you men are always ready enough to do that, without any assistance from us at all; nevertheless, I cannot disguise truths which are incontrovertible, and which I could not conceal but at the expence of candour and sincerity. I will, therefore, boldly pronounce, that in spite of the flattery of historians, who have from time to time handed down to posterity the faults, weaknesses, and virtues of both these illustrious ladies, and have not, I own, been sparing of those faults, however unfeeling or indecorous; I say that I may boldly pronounce, that neither were without blemishes, and the imperfections incident to human nature; but that, of the two, Mary was the least culpable, and being so exquisitely beautiful, was consequently exposed to greater temptations than Elizabeth, who, it is well known, possessed no beauty at all; nay, I will hardly give her credit for that great share of wisdom with which her flatterers (for they are nothing more) have so plentifully endowed her; for had she been wise, she would never have permitted a misplaced and infatuated passion to reign in her heart with such despotic influence as to supersede every other, at a season of life when reason only should have held

its sway. I say that she would not have done so, had she been wise, as they would have us suppose; for policy should have taught her better than to put herself in the power of a young man so conceitedly vain of his personal attractions, so boundless in his ambition, and so inconstant and wavering in his affections towards women, as was the Earl of Essex. What folly, what weakness did she not exhibit in her conduct during all the stages of this unhappy attachment! for which there was scarcely a shadow of excuse to extenuate her fault, knowing the libertine principles (which she could certainly not be blind to) which the Earl entertained for all womankind, and that the heart of such a man was not worth the sighing for. Here then was a proof positive that she had as little wisdom to boast of as other women, in circumstances which demanded the exercise of superior intellect and discretion, if she had really possessed it in that eminent degree which her historians declare. But she was no more than woman; and when we reflect on the unexampled cruelty of her conduct towards the young and lovely Mary, we can scarcely bestow on her a title of which she proved so unworthy, being a woman only in outward semblance; for her actions, disposition, and manner displayed none of the soft and feminine virtues which ought to distinguish her sex. Envy, rancour, malice, jealousy, were all exercised by the haughty Elizabeth on her unfortunate and beautiful rival. She could not even pity those weaknesses of which she herself was guilty; and Mary was called a wanton, because her heart had yielded to the tender sensibilities of her nature, which was warm, glowing, animated,

and affectionate beyond expression, to those objects who sought to win her regard, secure her esteem, and rivet her affections, which were too often betrayed indeed, and her sensitive heart and feelings too frequently wounded by the deepest ingratitude. Yet this did not, as in Elizabeth, awaken revenge, though it called forth resentment in her gentle bosom. Mary was not vindictive or cruel, although the victim of the most unceasing persecution from the rancorous hatred of her most cruel and malicious foes. With the most patient sweetness and exemplary fortitude she bore the long and continued period of her sufferings and unmerited reproach; and that her mortal career had not been rendered glorious and bright, as were lovely and transcendant the beauties of her person and mind, was not owing to any improper government of herself, but of those who governed over her; it was to the arts of others that she fell a prey, not to her own. Even her very failings (for I will not assert that she was entirely free from the imperfections of frail mortality) leaned to the side of humanity, and breathed adoration to the shrine of goodness and of virtue. Like a blighted flower, nipt by the untimely blast, she fell; but not unpitied was her fall, nor unrevenged the cruelty of her enemies; for the tears of the most virtuous have since moistened her remains, and lamented her undeserved doom; the sigh of sympathy has swelled in many a warm and generous bosom, and called forth many a sorrowing reflection, that such was the fate of genius, goodness, beauty, youth, sensibility, and accomplishments unrivalled.

"But for Elizabeth, historians may paint her wise,

and talk of virtues which they never knew, but who shall believe it? No, no, no, my good friends; till the page of cruelty, malice, rancour, envy, jealousy, can be erased from the volume which contains the catalogue of her Majesty's failings, we must not talk of her possessing any pre-eminence over the character of her lovely and unfortunate rival; till we can blot out the name of Mary from the reign of Elizabeth, let us be silent on the score of whatever virtues or humanity the latter illustrious lady may have possessed, for heaven's sake; and let us hear no more of her wisdom, since it is very clear that she had no more than she knew what to do with.

"As to Mary, we will leave wisdom completely out of the question; for when a woman so young and so beautiful, so tender and so affectionate, is assailed on every side with flattery the most persuasive, and in language the most eloquent and powerful, from the lips of the man she most loves and most confides in, there is something to be said; perhaps not from my own sex, gentlemen,—women do not easily excuse the faults of each other: but to allow the wise, grave, and politic Queen Elizabeth, at her age, to fall in love, and with a man so infinitely her younger in years, while to poor Mary is denied the natural propensity which youth, which beauty feels, to be delighted with the praises which a loved object has excited and inspired in a warm, tender, and generous breast, is partial, and too critically severe, gentlemen. And I will give to Elizabeth her meed, that she was a very good queen, but a very bad woman; otherwise, no jealous rage, no jealous fears, would have robbed her of one of woman's

sweetest charms, and I hope will ever be one of her most distinguished features—pity and compassion, generosity and tenderness, in all of which she proved herself to be entirely deficient, not only in her conduct to the most lovely and accomplished of her own sex, but in that she adopted to the only object she ever loved, the Earl of Essex, whom, in her ungoverned rage and jealousy, she condemned to immediate execution. Find me a woman who has ever done this, that ever truly loved, and I will give up my argument. But it cannot be; a woman may be a heroine in all things, but never to injure, never to devote to destruction, and to deprive of existence the being that she loves."

The Duchess paused; she cast her eyes around her, to see if she could discover, in any countenance, traces of displeasure or contradiction to what she had asserted; but she met with no opposing voice, no frowning, no dissenting look, save only from her own nephew, the Marquis of Rosalvie, who, fixing on his aunt a look of the most agonized and painful expression, exclaimed—

"And are there no women that are murderers, who do not immediately lead us to the place of execution, and yet torture us with a living death? Alas, your Grace has overlooked the many that have consigned us to a grave of far more insupportable agonies than those which the hand of Elizabeth inflicted on her destined victim; him she deprived of a short and transitory existence in a world of sorrow and of pain: but she who, while living, condemns her victim to the most ceaseless pangs of whole lengthened

days and nights of suffering, is a worse executioner than even the common hangman; for he absolves us from all earthly misery, certain here that it is sure to end; while the other only accumulates and prolongs the burthen, which they would have last for ever."

As the Marquis uttered this, his whole countenance had undergone a perceptible change; his cheeks were blanched, his lips quivered, and his voice was scarcely articulate from excessive emotion; and the sensations he excited in the breasts of the whole party were astonishment and regret that a subject should have been started to have awakened such painful emotions, or have renewed, in any degree, the secret and almost incurable malady that possessed him. He arose from his seat, and paced the room with wild and uncontrolable emotion; and Flora, feeling now more strongly than ever that her attachment to this unfortunate young nobleman was hopeless, and that the deep injuries he had reeeived from one of her sex could never be obliterated from his memory, sat the very image of despair, hardly daring to lift her eyes to that adored uncle, who read in her perturbed and agitated looks the secret conflicts of her mind.

"My dear Ormond," cried the Duchess, considerably affected by the situation of her nephew, "what has so strangely discomposed you? Surely a little harmless discussion on the merits of two illustrious favourites, whom time has long since mouldered in the dust, can in no degree have excited your displeasure or disgust."

"And in which your Grace has so powerfully driven us off the field," cried Lord Clairville, "that I protest

I do not think either Ponsonby or I will ever feel any inclination to renew the attack."

"No, indeed, her Grace is more than a match for us," uttered Ponsonby. "What say you, Sir Hector?"

"Decidedly so," cried Sir Hector; "we must all give in to so formidable an ally, for I cannot call her an enemy. Her Grace has uttered nothing but truth, and to that I subscribe. But gad zookers! let us now give a truce to argument and discussion on the merits or demerits of dead kings and queens; they cannot hear us, you know, were we extol them to the very skies; nor can they rise in judgment against us, were we any longer to expatiate upon their faults; so suppose we talk of something more pleasant to the ladies. What say you, Lady Sophia, with that love-laughing eye? You look inclined for something to relieve this sombre weight of argument; and you are sitting close to the harp, on which I presume you play most admirably. What say you to enchanting us with some of your lively airs?"

"With all my heart, Sir Hector, if a certain personage here present will join me in a lively duetto," cried Lady Sophia, laughing, and slyly glancing at the Marquis of Rosalvie, who, having entirely recovered his self-composure, had entered into conversation with Lady Emmeline and her amiable mother, the latter of whom had succeeded in restoring him to his wonted tranquillity; and it was very perceptible, that in this conversation the lovely young widow had no small share; for Flora, on raising her eyes, found those of Rosalvie fixed on her with the most earnest and scru-

tinizing attention: but there was any thing but an expression of approbation in the quick and hurried glance he had directed towards her, which crimsoned the face of Flora in a moment with the most beautiful dyes; and though unconscious that she did so, she sighed mournfully on the reflection that no power of hers would ever have sufficient influence to awaken him from the deep and overwhelming melancholy which clouded and even obscured the brightness of his intelligent mind; and that notwithstanding the tale which the pretty Emmeline had so ingeniously told her of the myrtle, she was at this moment more than ever an object of the most perfect indifference to him. How far Flora's conjecture might be true, we cannot take upon ourselves to decide, for it is impossible to develope the hearts of men more than those of women, because it is certain that they are equally subject to caprice, and ten thousand times more prone to fickleness and change in affairs of the heart. And in this doubtful light, at the precise moment, did Flora, with the most painfully acute and mortifying sensations, regard the conduct of Rosalvie, who actually wore the appearance, not only of indifference, but of utter cold apathy towards one of the loveliest and most animated creatures that breathed of earthly mould.

But far otherwise appeared the Earl of Clairville; for he was not only deeply captivated with the charms of the lovely widow, but he took care to let every one else observe the ardent passion with which she had inspired him, not by a fulsome and ridiculous display of unmeaning compliments directed to her person, but by an offer of those delicate and respectful attentions

which a man of honour always pays to the woman whom he sincerely and devoutly loves, and wishes to make his wife in the face of the whole world: with which Sir Hector was by no means displeased, heartily lamenting that his lovely niece did not feel that predilection in favour of so amiable and accomplished a man, as he feared she already did for an object to whom he was greatly apprehensive, all lovely and irresistibly engaging as she was, she was perfectly indifferent. And though pride and the inherent delicacy which belonged to her sex would very naturally urge Flora to conceal this hopeless attachment from all mortal knowledge, yet he feared that she had too much sensibility not to let it prey deeply on her mind, and that it would eventually, if it did not shortly subside, deprive her of tranquillity, and throw a cloud over that brilliant vivacity which was the charm of her existence. Besides, although Sir Hector greatly admired the Marquis for the shining talents with which he seemed peculiarly gifted, and though he lamented the misfortunes which had so fatally plunged him into such a gloomy and melancholy temperature of disposition, yet he saw something mysterious in all this, and by no means congenial either with his own sentiments, or those of Flora. In short, unless a very perceptible change took place in the manners of the Marquis, he was by no means the sort of man that he wished of all others to become the husband of Lady Primrose. He was handsome, uncommonly so; accomplished,—that too was unquestionable, for he had already displayed traits of the most elegant taste and genius. He was rich too; but what did Flora want with riches? and what

was either beauty or accomplishments in a married life, if there were not other materials to form the foundation of domestic happiness? Nothing. With an unhappy man, always feeding on sorrow, and drinking at the bitter fountain of eternal regret, how could Flora be happy, even if she loved him to adoration? And more averse than ever to turning his thoughts to the most distant probability that the Marquis would ever address Flora in the character of a lover, he tried to chase from his mind the unwelcome reflection, and again solicited Lady Sophia to play and sing; and as this fashionable young lady was excessively vain of her accomplishments, and equally fond of displaying them, not only in the eyes of her lover, but in those of an admiring world, she instantly sat down to her harp, and carelessly turning over the leaves of some new lessons, bade Ponsonby select one to which he thought she could do justice. Ponsonby immediately obeyed the commands of his lovely enslaver, and bending over her with a smile of the most insinuating softness, exclaimed—

"Then you must favour us with the whole of these elegant and tasteful compositions, for I cannot select one that you do not sing divinely."

Her Ladyship blushed deeply; but it was a blush that slyly told a flattering tale to one who scarcely wanted any additional proof of the empire he had obtained over her heart, which had been for a considerable time past securely in his possession, but was certainly more perceptible in her Ladyship's manner, conversation, and conduct, than it had ever yet appeared in public, which of course gave rise to a conjecture, that the ho-

nourable gentleman had made overtures, which had met with the fullest approbation of the Countess of Stormond, and that Lady Sophia herself was not by any means averse to entering the holy state of matrimony with a fine handsome young fellow, who had every prospect of jumping into an estate of nearly ten thousand per annum; and the fashionable rumours which had already been circulated, that their nuptials would shortly take place, were certainly not without the surest foundation; for Captain Ponsonby had, within the last few days, solicited a private conference with the amiable Countess, in which he immediately disclosed the nature of his sentiments respecting Lady Sophia Russel, at the same moment that he implored permission of the Countess to address her daughter on the subject of his heart; and to which her Ladyship, after a moment's hesitation, made the following reply:—

"I am perfectly satisfied, Ponsonby, with the candour and sincerity you have adopted both towards me and my daughter, on a point in which the happiness of her whole life is so materially concerned; and, satisfied with the honour and strict integrity of your intentions, I accept your proposals with unfeigned pleasure, and, as far as depends upon myself, freely grant you the indulgence you request, that of addressing my daughter on the subject. But remember, Ponsonby, I will have nothing more to do with the affair, and that you must appeal to Sophia alone to receive you in the character of an affianced husband. When I married myself, my father, of whom I was the sole offspring, left me to the free choice of my affections; and al-

though he so highly appreciated the merits of my Lord Stormond, and had frequently been implored by the Earl to use his influence to engage my affections, said nothing more to me, than,—'Julia, the Earl of Stormond loves you, and has made the most honourable avowal of his passion to your father. As your father, I will declare that I have no objection to the proposal he has made, or to consider him as my future son-in-law, as I conceive him to be every way worthy of your regard. But I will say no more, my Julia; you are to marry him, and not me. I am going to send him to you. Do as your heart directs you. If you find him dear to that heart, you have my sanction to encourage his honourable suit; but if not, reject him instantly; you have also my permission to do that. I will never fetter the inclination of my child.' Now, Ponsonby," added the amiable Countess, "as I had no compulsion to force me to marry if I did not like it, I am unwilling that my own children should be subject to an opposite system of government, and therefore leave them entirely at liberty to choose for themselves. Go, then, to my Sophia, and tell her this, and she will of course do as her heart directs her, as her mother did before her. Not that I suspect," cried the lovely Countess, with a bewitching smile, and extending her hand towards Ponsonby at the same moment, "not that I suspect that Sophia will send you back to me in a fit of absolute despair; no, indeed, I do not believe that the little gipsey will do any such thing; so go your ways, and Heaven prosper you with success."

Ponsonby obeyed the injunction; he flew to his adored Sophia, disclosed the fervent passion of his

heart, repeated the words of Lady Stormond to her daughter, who blushed a little, sighed a little, but at length pronounced the dear ecstatic "Yes;" and the enraptured Ponsonby returned to her Ladyship one of the most successful thriving wooers in the world, and was accordingly received as the accepted lover of Lady Sophia Russel from that very moment. The familiar intercourse which now subsisted between them was therefore no longer a matter of surprise to the fashionable visitants that crowded Stormond Lodge; and the young lady was congratulated on every side on the prospects of dawning felicity that awaited her on her marriage with so amiable and accomplished a man as the Honourable Captain Ponsonby. Nor was Lady Sophia at all averse to receiving those congratulations, so flattering to her youthful vanity.

It was in this state of affairs that Lady Primrose and Sir Hector Oldstock had been invited to dine at Stormond Lodge; where Flora in an instant perceived on what footing the Honourable Captain Ponsonby was now received in the bosom of a family of which he was so shortly to become a member; for the manner which Lady Sophia had at first adopted towards her was totally changed, and she now addressed her in terms of the most conciliating friendship, and seemed anxious to cultivate a more unreserved confidence in the good opinion of the beautiful young widow. And Flora could not but acknowledge that this change in Lady Sophia was as unexpected as it was most pleasing. But Flora had so little of female vanity in her composition as to be unable to guess at the cause which had produced so great an alteration in the man-

ner of Lady Sophia towards her. Flora did not know how greatly Lady Sophia had dreaded her as a rival in the heart of Captain Ponsonby. The uncommon attractive loveliness of the young widow had made Sophia tremble for the loss of her lover; nor till he had declared himself such, could Flora be endured in the sight of Lady Sophia Russel. But now all fears were at an end; since Ponsonby had revealed the situation of his heart to her mother, and confessed the true nature of his regard for her, what had she to fear from the attractions of the lovely widow, or any other object in creation? And free from prejudice, she could now admire Flora with the rest of the admiring multitude that paid homage to her charms. Lady Sophia's attention, therefore, on this day, to her mother's lovely guest, was marked with a peculiar expression of kindness and respectful deference; which was the more welcome to poor Flora on this occasion than any other, because her own feelings were so particularly under the influence of the most mortifying sensations.

Nor had the sweet Emmeline been unconscious of the depressed spirits of the lovely widow. She had exerted every art in her power to draw forth her charming vivacity, and had in some degree succeeded, when Sophia had been solicited by Sir Hector to give them a specimen of the delightful accomplishment in which she so eminently excelled. And Ponsonby having turned over the leaves of several admired airs, peculiarly adapted to the voice of Lady Sophia, at length selected the following, which was a favourite song of the Marquis of Rosalvie, and to which he now appeared to listen with the most profound attention. The

music was Italian; the words written by an English gentleman, and ran thus:—

THE GOOD NIGHT.

"Good night, my love! farewell my dear!
I've said it oft, with sigh and tear,
Aching heart, and faultering tongue,
When our affection, love, was young:
But now with hope's most vivid cheer,
Good night, my love! farewell my dear!

"Yet call those words the mournful tone,
My own sweet girl! my own! my own!
And though our sunder'd hours be few,
There's languor in the brief adieu;
But soon return's bless'd hour shall cheer,
Good night, my love! farewell, my dear!

"We've said so oft, and turn'd to go,
And yet return'd—to sever slow;—
One more fond look—one kiss—embrace—
Warm heart to heart—face pressing face.
A footstep warns! the world's cold geer
Would mock our love! good night, my dear!

"Aye,—these are laughed at by the wise,—
The pang of heart, the dew of eyes,
Anxious throes, or rapture's zest,
Wild, throb, or glow, of lover's breast.
Be we affection's fools! nor fear,
Good night, my love! farewell, my dear!"

Never had Lady Sophia performed so tastefully, or sung with more execution or spirit. Her voice was powerful and melodious; and when she concluded, she received the most rapturous applause from her

delighted auditors, of which the Marquis of Rosalvie was not the least profuse. But although the Marquis, who was passionately fond of music, and was himself a fine performer on several instruments, had paid the most devout attention to Lady Sophia during the time she was playing, and had seemed to enter into the spirit of the lively airs and duettos which were afterwards given in a sweet enchanting style by both the accomplished daughters of the Countess of Stormond, Lady Emmeline, at the earnest request of the Duchess of Pemberton having immediately joined her sister; yet no influence or persuasion of any of the party could prevail upon him to favour them with a specimen of his abilities.

"Then I positively will never sing your favourite Good-night to you again, my Lord," cried Lady Sophia, now resigning her situation at the harp to her sister, with some degree of petulance marked very expressively in her countenance; "no, indeed, since you are so unkindly and obstinately perverse in having your own way, why I will have mine, I assure you; so no more good nights for your Lordship, of Sophia's playing."

"That is right, my dear," cried the Duchess, laughing, "rate him soundly, for he merits your reproach, in that respect, as well as mine; for do you know that I can never get the ill-natured creature to play a single air for me since he has been at the Round Tower, though he knows how gratifying that would be to me, and could not be attended with much trouble to himself."

The Marquis coloured deeply; for, somehow or

other the eyes of Flora had strayed towards him at the precise moment that this speech of the amiable Duchess was playfully addressed, partly to Lady Sophia Russel, and partly to her nephew; and he exclaimed, with some embarrassment—

"I hope that neither your Grace nor Lady Sophia will find me guilty of affectation, when I positively declare to you, that music and I have been out of sorts for these two years; and although it is true, that I was once an enthusiastic lover of harmony, and perhaps a tolerable proficient in the science, yet I have been, for various and combined reasons, dead to its powerful and lovely fascinations for some time past. In the climes of Italy I first acquired a passion for music; in Italy I left that passion behind me."

"Which has given you no relish for any that we can offer you here in your own native country, England;" cried Lady Sophia, with an air of peculiar irony. "Upon my word, my Lord, we English women are infinitely obliged to you for the specimen you have given of your taste; and I appeal to some of the ladies here present, if it is not the most barbarous sentiment ever expressed, where only English women are before you. Lady Primrose, does not the Marquis of Rosalvie now merit the retort courteous from all of us? for what he has advanced, you know, is clearly to attest, that none but Italian women have the charm of pleasing."

The cheeks of Flora, on being thus unexpectedly called upon, and in the presence of the only object in whose eyes she wished to appear pleasing, were covered with blushes of the most roseate hue; and the attention with which she was now regarded by the

whole company, rendered it a most difficult task for her to reply without offending some of them; and she remained silent for the space of a few moments, hardly knowing what to say, and yet resolved to say something equally spirited and severe; for she had felt indignant, as well as Lady Sophia, with the ill compliment which the Marquis had bestowed on her countrywomen. Whether Sir Hector perceived the expression in her lovely countenance, or that he exactly felt that he should enjoy any spirited retort made by Flora on the apparently insensate feelings of the stoic Marquis, we cannot tell; but certain it is, he seemed most impatiently anxious for the reply of his lovely niece, which not being quite so prompt and ready as he imagined it would be on such an occasion, he exclaimed—

"Come, Lady Primrose, you have been appealed to, and by one of your own lovely sex, on a subject that reflects some discredit on the talents of your countrywomen; and we are all, I dare say, waiting most anxiously to hear your decision, whether you do not think that my Lord Marquis here has not been unnecessarily severe in pronouncing that Italian ladies are the only ones capable of exciting fascination by their vocal abilities. Now I, for my own part, love to hear the voice of an English songstress beyond that of any other in the created universe, and would not give one fig for the melodious pipes of all the Signoras that could be imported from foreign climes. I love the little lovely nightingale of my dear native shades more than all the Catalanis in the world."

"Pardon me, Sir Hector," cried the Marquis, now

more deeply colouring than before; "but it was never to the voice of a Catalani, that I listened with such delight, nor was it to the taste of an Italian syren, that I ascribed the fascination with which I was inspired while in Italy for the love of music: from an English woman only did I hear those sounds of harmony, and from an English woman only did I acquire a knowledge of that delightful science; and it is from the avowed taste and exquisite judgment of an English woman that I have this evening listened with delight, in the beautiful specimens with which Lady Sophia Russel has enchanted us. And although her Ladyship has taken the trouble to be unnecessarily severe upon the general sentiments that I so incautiously (I will allow) expressed, yet she is erroneous in supposing that I do not sufficiently appreciate the merits, the talents, and the bright excellence of my fair countrywomen; and may I perish this moment, by the most slighted neglect of their heavenly smiles, if ever I refuse to them the meed that they so truly deserve—that of being the most lovely, the most chaste, and the most amiable beings in existence."

"Bravo, Marquis!" cried Sir Hector, "you have now fairly recovered the field you had nearly lost."

"Yes, he has brought up the rear," cried Lady Sophia, archly looking at the blushing Flora, on whose lovely and ingenuous countenance the eyes of Rosalvie had for a moment been turned with a peculiar and almost indefinable expression; but certainly it was that of admiration in the extreme, as she timidly pronounced—

"Whether you have gained a victory, or lost one,

in this encounter, my Lord, I really cannot positively decide; but I should not have pronounced judgment against you, even if you had preferred Italian taste and science to that of this country, or of any other, because I do not at all see that England has any right to value itself on pre-eminence, and that every one is a judge of that which pleases them best; and I do not consider that your Lordship in particular should be set apart from the general rule more than any other personage here present."

Although Flora had coloured deeply at the commencement of this speech, finding that all eyes were directed towards her with the most curious attention; yet she recovered her self-composure almost immediately, conscious that ingenuousness and truth had dictated her sentiments: and perhaps some more powerful incentive had inspired her with so bewitching an eloquence to plead the cause of an object, who, in spite of the eccentric disposition and singularity of manner that he displayed, was growing every hour in her esteem and admiration, by a nameless combination of talent and graces, in which she could perceive that none of his sex could at all rival him; but whether it was pity for his misfortunes, or admiration of his talents, that excited this sentiment in his favour, Flora could not divine.

Nor could the Marquis exactly tell what were his impressions of Flora, after this day passed in her society at Stormond Lodge. He liked her better, it is certain, than he did at first. He thought her childish and trifling on the night of the ball; and her choice of Sir Charles Ratcliff as a partner in the dance had by

no means removed this prejudice against her;—that because beautiful, she was vain; that because rich, she was too proud of the advantages of fortune; that because young, she was foolish and inconstant: but the Marquis had taken a nearer survey of Flora on a second interview, and found that her uncommon loveliness of person was her least perfection; that she had sense, modesty, and discretion, with the most bewitching playfulness and simplicity of manners: and the speech she had delivered in his favour, and which had called forth so many enchanting blushes to her lovely cheeks, was the effect of a pure heart and ingenuous mind. And at the moment that her Ladyship's carriage was announced, he felt the most irresistible inclination to press forward, notwithstanding the marked assiduities of Lord Clairville, and seize her hand, which he not only succeeded in doing, as she was bidding adieu to the amiable Countess and her charming family, but he contrived to whisper in her ear, as he again led her across the gallery—

"Till this night, Lady Primrose, beautiful as you confessedly are, I have been insensible to the lovely semblance, not knowing that it contained so rich a jewel within. Forgive me; I have regarded you with suspicion, too fearful that youthful vanity would have induced you to encourage the idle coxcombs that flutter around you. I am deceived; you are an angel in mind, as you resemble one in your person. I am anxious to secure your permanent happiness by a second choice, whenever you choose to make it. Wonder not, therefore, that I shall henceforth be jealous of your conduct, and that I shall view with a nice and

discriminating eye every man who would aspire to the hand and the heart of Lady Primrose."

There was no time for further conversation; Flora was seated by the side of her uncle; Henry Conway followed; and the carriage immediately proceeded to Stanmore Priory.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"A slight blush, a soft tremor, a calm kind
Of gentle feminine delight, and shewn
More in the eyelids than the eyes, resign'd
Rather to hide what pleases most unknown,
Are the best tokens (to a modest mind)
Of love, when seated on his loveliest throne,
A sincere woman's breast; for over warm
Or over cold, annihilates the charm."

LORD BYRON.

IF ever time flew on roseate wings, it was the few fleeting moments that Rosalvie, with Flora's snowy arm linked in his, conducted her to her carriage, in which both Sir Hector and Henry Conway had quietly seated themselves before she arrived: but Flora saw them not, and heard them not, when the Marquis, with a soft pressure of the hand, and a look and a voice indicative alone of the purest and yet most impassioned language of the heart, respectfully resigning his lovely charge to the care of her uncle, bade her good night.

"We parted on the threshold of this door once before, Lady Primrose," uttered he; "do you remember it?"

And the hasty half-blushing tremulous look which the young widow then directed towards him, told him plainly that she had not forgotten it: but for worlds Flora could not have repeated to the Marquis the short sentence of "Good night." It was not a moment to trust to the sound even of her own voice, which would instantly have betrayed the tumultuous tide of joy which was then flushing to her heart, and had already spread its bright tints over her beautiful and animated countenance: but it was night, and neither the blushes, nor the ecstatic sensations which she now felt, were discoverable to the eyes of her uncle, or the young soldier, during their ride to Stanmore Priory, except that at first Sir Hector archly observed that his Lordship had taken his time in escorting her across the gallery.

"Gad zookers!" cried Sir Hector, "if it had not been for Henry, who made me sit still whether I would or no, I positively believe I should have made my way back into the drawing-room of my Lady Stormond, to have made some inquiries after my niece Flora."

"Dear uncle, you do not recollect what a long gallery we had to pass through, and that my Lord Marquis walked but slowly, on purpose to—to—to"—

Flora paused.

"To what, Flora?" cried Sir Hector, in so peculiarly a quaint tone, that Henry, in spite of the utmost gravity, found it difficult to smother a laugh, which, however, out of respect to Flora, he at last contrived to do, as she replied, with the most perceptible embarrassment—

"To—to—to—address a few words to me of—advice—friendly advice—that is all—uncle."

"And a devilish pretty time he chose for his *friendly* exhortation and kindly counsel, with a plague to him," cried Sir Hector, with some degree of petulance; "just as you were on the eve of departure, and two persons waiting for you in the carriage, whose patience was exhausted at your unaccountable long stay. And what the devil do you want with his friendly advice, pray? Confound such friendly admonishers, I say; the man who approaches a woman in the character of a friend has no need of going in a round-about way to tell her of it, but declares his sentiments in the face of the whole world. And though I admire this Marquis as a young man of extraordinary talent, yet I cannot help saying that there is some degree of affectation in him, highly offensive to manly feeling and candour. Hang it, it is bad enough to converse with women that are affected, whose personal loveliness may sometimes atone for the evil thereof; but affectation in the male sex is insupportably odious and ridiculous."

"Dear uncle, you are now departing from your usual kindness and liberality of disposition," cried Flora, a little piqued and somewhat mortified in hearing this hasty judgment pronounced on an object she so greatly admired, and whom nothing could now persuade her was not the most amiable being in creation; "for you would not this moment be so unnecessarily severe on the unfortunate and unhappy Marquis. He does not affect what he does not truly feel, I am sure; he is or has been suffering under some heavy and unmerited afflictions; and it is not affectation that at

moments makes him appear so abstracted and so melancholy."

"Then he should leave his abstraction and his melancholy behind him when he goes abroad," cried Sir Hector, "and not infest or annoy others with his ridiculous starts of passion, his vapourish sighs, and his half pronounced sentences, which no mortal can divine the meaning of but himself."

"But you will allow that some of his arguments carry sound sense and judgment along with them, will not you, my dear sir," cried Henry Conway, perceiving that the lovely widow was by no means in a humour to relish the severity of her uncle, and suspecting that the Marquis was considerably gaining ground in her good graces; "I think I never heard a more eloquent or more powerful orator than the Marquis of Rosalvie."

To which Sir Hector dryly muttered—

"You never heard a fiddlestick's end. The fellow has a handsome face, some tolerable judgment, a decent memory, and plenty of plausibility; and with these points in his favour, he commences his attack on the defenceless party, and of course carries the day, because they have no forces to rally: and I imagine that if the other gentlemen had exerted themselves, his Lordship would not have come off with the flying colours that he did. My Lord Clairville, for instance, was nearly a match for him. However, I will admit that this said Marquis is no fool; and if he would get rid of those cursed vapourish habits which he now and then adopts, by way of variety, I suppose, would be a desirable companion on a hard day's

march; though confound me if I should like much of his company in close winter quarters."

"You speak like a soldier, uncle," cried Flora, heartily glad to be relieved from this discussion by the carriage now suddenly stopping at the gates of the Priory; but not before Sir Hector had replied, though in perfect good humour with his lovely niece—

"And a soldier speaks like a man, Flora; and gad zookers! I am one of those that will speak my mind too, though all the world should be against me."

"And you have two to one against you now, uncle," cried Flora, as Henry handed her from the carriage; but nothing further was said about the Marquis that night by either of the party, each retiring to their respective chambers, and all with different sensations, thoughts, and sentiments on the occurrences of the day they had passed at the Countess of Stormond's. With Sir Hector, his thoughts had amounted to an almost perfect conviction that the heart of Flora was closely besieged by little Cupid, and that it was nearly willing to surrender, if actively pursued; and there was no doubt but the fastidious Marquis (for such he appeared at the very best in the eyes of Sir Hector) was equally enamoured with the charms of the lovely young widow. It was not that Sir Hector conceived that he had any right to control Flora in a point which so materially concerned her happiness, or that he intended to put any opposing voice to a second choice, if she felt inclined to make it; but at present he wished any object to have the preference in that choice rather than the Marquis of Rosalvie, for reasons as afore stated, because the Marquis had loved before, and had been deceived

in that love. And he thought that Flora's lovely person, and Flora's immense property, ought to have destined her for a first object, and not a secondary, in any man's affections, were he monarch of the whole world. But in this respect we must allow that Sir Hector was a little too arbitrary, because we do not admit that destiny, so often blamed for the tide of human affairs, has ought to do with love. To arraign providence for the follies and the weaknesses of humanity would be sacrilege indeed. For nothing evil can come of Heaven's own appointment: the evil is created of ourselves, and is the consequence of our own blind perverted judgment, which when it happens to turn out unpromising to our hopes and wishes, and our fondest expectations prove unsuccessful and vain, we falsely and profanely accuse divine administration as the author of our complicated misery. But it is not so; it is not destiny that rules our fate, provided that we do not provoke its just and merited punishments, but rather the corruption of our own faulty natures that hurls down vengeance upon us.

But the reflections of the delighted Flora on the words so suddenly and unexpectedly addressed to her by the Marquis of Rosalvie, were such as to awaken in her the purest delight, from a consciousness that the deep interest and solicitude he had so warmly expressed for her welfare arose from a more tender sentiment than that of friendship towards her: and though she could not account for the before so cold and restrained manner he had hitherto adopted, yet his looks and words plainly told her that on this evening she was by no means an object of indifference to him; and

him only did she wish to please. She was therefore determined to repulse, nay, openly to reject, if necessity required it, the overtures made to her by the Earl of Clairville, who gave her every reason to suppose that he would very shortly make her an offer of his hand; nay, he had, during the conversations he had held with her uncle, obtained his permission to visit at the Priory. She had overheard Sir Hector invite him there at the earliest opportunity, in which permission she thought her uncle had stretched a point beyond what even their near relationship had given him; and tenderly attached as she really and truly was to this dear and affectionate uncle, yet Flora was determined to remain the free mistress of her own heart and actions, and that if she made a second choice of a husband, her own inclinations, and not that of others, must govern it. Not that the Earl of Clairville was by any means an objectionable acquaintance; he was a perfectly accomplished, and appeared a very amiable personage, while his exalted rank entitled him to the respect of the most polished society. Flora had no possible objection to meeting him, or admitting him to her house as a friend; but she revolted at the thoughts of his ever becoming her lover. She wanted no lover, except that lover was of her own heart's free election, and felt that she would not be controlled in that respect by any mortal in existence.

These were the thoughts of the young and lovely widow, long after her attendant had quitted the room, and she had closed her beauteous eyes in balmy sleep. What she dreamt of, we cannot say, that made her so restless and disturbed on her downy pillow; but cer-

tain it was that Flora could not sleep long, for the life of her.

Nor were the slumbers of Henry Conway more refreshing, tranquil, or composed; for the lovely image of the sweet Fanny Evelyn, whom he had not beheld at the Priory for many succeeding days, and whom the beautiful daughters of the Countess of Stormond had by no means rivalled in the young soldier's estimation, still stole on his recollection, with all the fascinating graces which so sweetly harmonized with every soft and gentle feature; and he anticipated the hour when he should again have the happiness of conversing with her. A day had indeed been agreed on for dining at the Rectory before Sir Hector should depart for Oldstock Hall; but that day was uncertain, for it depended wholly on Sir Hector himself, whose whimsicality of humour Henry was fully acquainted with; the slightest gust of passion, if any thing opposed his favourite propensities, would, he was well convinced, alter his intention of visiting the Rectory at all before he set out for Oldstock Hall; and in that case he would not have a chance of seeing the lovely Fanny again, whom he admired most of all the females he had ever yet seen or conversed with. She was so gentle, so mild, and so femininely lovely. And were not the daughters of the Countess of Stormond lovely too? Certainly he could not but acknowledge that Lady Sophia Russel was extremely beautiful, and her young sister, Lady Emmeline, highly interesting; but they did not resemble Fanny Evelyn: she was humble like himself; and he was very sure that her disposition was congenial to his own: she was grave too,

and timidly reserved; for he had no predilection for lively women; even the enchanting vivacity of Lady Primrose suited not with the quiet temperature of Henry's uncommonly sedate character: and he thought that when Flora laughed so incessantly, and sported with her facetious uncle to an excess, that she would have looked far more beautiful if she could have borrowed ten minutes gravity of her charming friend. But Flora was grave enough the ensuing morning, when they met at the breakfast table; and the absence of her charming spirits was even remarked by her fond uncle, which met with a blush and a smile from Flora, who pleaded a slight head-ache for appearing so stupidly dull. The excuse was admitted, but not without a sly insidious smile which sat upon the round ruddy face of the old soldier, as turning quickly to Henry, he exclaimed—

"And pray Hal, what makes *you* so stupidly dull? Has Lady Primrose infected you with a head-ache too, and from the same cause? For curse me if I have heard either you or her utter a sentence since we have sat down to breakfast?"

Henry coloured deeply, and slightly glancing at the now equally flushed cheeks of Flora, stammered out—

"Why really, sir, I have got"——

Henry saw the curious, sharp, and inquiring eye of his patron fixed full upon him, and could not finish his sentence for the life of him; and Sir Hector, now laughing most immoderately, vociferated—

"It is very plain, Hal, that both you and Lady Primrose have got something that you cannot get rid of without some assistance of the heavenly planets; Mars and

Venus, I suppose, in conjunction, must be applied to on the occasion; there are some very effectual remedies to be resorted to under their most powerful influence, I assure you. What say you, Flora?"

"Lord, uncle, what would you have me say to any thing half so absurdly ridiculous?" cried Flora, a little nettled at being thus detected in the stratagem she had made use of to excuse her want of spirits on this morning more than any other; and instantly proposed, as the best remedy they could apply to on the present occasion for enlivening their spirits, and putting them into good humour, to take a ride over to the Rectory, and bring the Evelyns home to dinner.

"Gad zookers! an excellent thought, Flora," cried Sir Hector; "I want to see Evelyn, to arrange something for the Welsh bard and his pretty little brood of chickens while I am gone to Oldstock Hall. And Harry wants to see Miss Fanny, to talk to her on another subject, don't you, Hal? You are longing to see Miss Evelyn, though you don't choose to say so."

"Sir, I will own that I am always happy to see Miss Evelyn," cried Henry, with so apparently an air of modest ingenuousness exhibited in bright glows on his fine ruddy and intelligent countenance, that Sir Hector was at no loss to guess at the nature of his sentiments for the amiable daughter of his respected friend, and had already pre-determined, in his own mind, that his adopted young favourite should not be discouraged by him in his growing attachment for an object so every way worthy of his election. Not choosing, however, to communicate his thoughts, or

express his intentions, till his affairs at Oldstock Hall were more finally settled, he hummed a bit of an old favourite song, of

"Why, soldiers, why
Should we be melancholy."

And marched out of the room with the step and the air of a true military hero, telling Flora to send him word when the carriage was at the door, and that he would be in readiness to attend her summons; and for a few moments the young soldier was left alone with Flora. It was not often, indeed, that Sir Hector gave them any opportunity of enjoying a *tete a tete* together; but when they were without the presence of a third person, Flora, who precisely knew the state of Henry Conway's heart with respect to her lovely friend, always contrived to talk of Fanny Evelyn; and in return for so much kindness, Henry never forgot to say something about the Marquis of Rosalvie. The pleasure, therefore, which they derived from these conversations was as perfectly mutual as they were perfectly natural; and Flora, half smiling as her facetious uncle retreated with a quick march out of the door, playfully exclaimed—

"How tormenting my uncle is about poor Fanny and you, Mr. Conway; and yet it is more owing to the whimsicality of his humour than to any real pleasure he takes in teazing one so: he is not ill-natured, though he is positively at times insufferably provoking."

To which, deeply colouring, the young soldier replied—

"But he is not aware, your Ladyship, that there are moments when such sport, as he calls it, is death to the feelings of a too sensibly acute heart, in which hope and fear are alternately the guests; and that some objects are so sacredly dear to us, that we cannot endure any thing that seems only trifling, or approaches to derision, when they are introduced as the subjects of conversation. I, for my part, find it impossible to laugh even at the jokes and pleasantry of my patron, when Miss Evelyn is the object of his merriment; I feel, I confess, something of displeasure proudly swelling at my heart, as though it would burst its confines, when the name of Fanny is uttered with unmeaning and ill-seasoned pleasantry. Perhaps I may be imprudent in expressing the nature of my feelings for this lovely young lady; but you, you, Lady Primrose, will not condemn me for feelings which I cannot avoid, which I have not the power to control. Yes, you are all goodness and charity, and you will pity me, rather than censure the weakness of a heart that doats, doubts, despairs, and yet presumptuously hopes."

The remark of Henry was too just; and he had made an appeal to the heart of Flora, the situation of which too much resembled his own; for she both doubted, feared, and yet cherished hope in her panting bosom for that stranger-guest she had already admitted there: and a gentle sigh, and a soft blush, as she raised her eyes to meet those of the young soldier, told him how little right she had to censure or condemn those feelings, which were so similar to her own, with respect to the Marquis of Rosalvie; and she softly pronounced—

"Henry, were I to condemn you, I should condemn myself. I am no stranger to the anxieties, the thousand tender anxieties, and doubts, and fears that you have described; my own breast has been tortured, agonized by them: and shall I not compassionate yours? Nay, I will do more, I will encourage you to hope. Yes," added Flora, a tear starting to her lovely eyes, "for you, Henry, there is hope; for me, none. I love,—yes, too certain do I love; but alas! it is equally certain that no heart sighs responsive to the echoes of mine, and that he whom I adore feels no passion in return for——Flora."

"Ah, dear angelic lady!" cried Henry, warmed with the most transported gratitude for the tender sympathy she had expressed, and the sweet encouragement she had given to the fervent passion he had disclosed for the lovely Fanny, and deeply concerned that she considered her regard for the Marquis so hopeless,) "it is utterly impossible that the man so blessed, so honoured by Lady Primrose, can be insensible to the inestimable treasure of such a heart; he is not, cannot be blind to such exquisite loveliness of person, such transcendant perfections of mind, such innate goodness of heart. Ah, no! dear Lady Primrose, you cannot be the object of that man's indifference whom you so greatly exalt by the entire possession of your invaluable heart."

"Do not deceive me, dear Henry, with a supposition of the kind," sighed out Flora; "the Marquis has been betrayed once by a woman, and he will never trust to one again. He believes, for her single sake, that all women are false and faithless. Let him think

on; Flora will take no pains to convince him how erroneously he libels her sex. But—but"—and Flora sighed deeply—"an hour may yet come, when he will find that women can be as true of heart as men, and will then lament the bitterness of his reproach."

"And I will stake the bright unsullied honour of a soldier," cried Henry, with the most enthusiastic warmth of feeling, with which the tender and subdued softness of the lovely widow had inspired him, "that the Marquis is the willing slave to those bright charms yet, and that he will own how unjustly he has censured the constancy of woman, merely because he had known one changing butterfly, that roved from flower to flower. I shall yet see that day arrive, at which you have so distantly glanced, but I think will approach sooner than you imagine, when another form and another heart will recompense him for all the pangs he has endured for one false and faithless she; yes, Lady Primrose, my augaries will greatly deceive me, if in less than a period of six months you are not the bride of the Marquis of Rosalvie; with all his hatred and prejudice towards your fair and lovely sex, he will turn out to be the sincerest convert imaginable from his ill-grounded opinion."

"Me the bride of the Marquis of Rosalvie in less than a period of six months!" echoed Flora, in a tone at first of ecstasy, which gradually lowered in its beautiful and animated modulations, till it became more soft, murmuring, faultering, tremulous, and broken. "Ah, no, dear Henry, such a thought does not mix with my calculations of earthly happiness. But a truce to these sombre reflections, for they have positively

made me quite vapourish and melancholy; and I protest that we have been talking till time has been making some rapid strides towards us."

"Ah, lady, time flies on easy wings when we are employed in talking of those we love," answered Henry.

And Flora, while she blushed deeply, could not but acknowledge the truth of the observation; for she had never once thought it necessary to repair to the toilet, to make any change in her attire; and the carriage, which had been ordered, was already drawn up to the door. Flora sprang from her chair, ran up to her dressing-room, and desiring Rachel to throw a veil over her gipsey bonnet, and to fling a mantle over her shoulders, was prepared in ten minutes to attend her uncle, never looking half so bewitchingly lovely as when thus unadorned by the aid of ornament or dress. And Sir Hector, who only gazed on her pretty features, forgot to remark, that although she had sufficient time, she was still in the plain morning gown in which she had sat down to breakfast; so little does real beauty require any assistance borrowed from fashionable art to set it off.

Sir Hector was in excellent good humour and spirits when they arrived at the Rectory; and Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn, and their lovely daughter, received the highest gratification at being honoured with so friendly a visit, and at so early an hour.

"It is so kind of you, my love," cried Mrs. Evelyn, "to bestow a thought on your poor humble Rectory friends in the midst of the splendid circle of gay and fashionable folks by which you have been surrounded

in the magnificent mansion of the Countess of Stormond. And you, dear Sir Hector, how highly gratified Mr. Evelyn will be to-day with your charming society, and how delightfully *apropos*, for he is this day quite disengaged from public duty."

"I am heartily glad to hear it, Madam," cried Sir Hector, "for then I shall have so much more pleasure in his society. But I have a great deal of business to transact with my friend Evelyn, I assure you; so I hinted to my niece before we came out; and the consequence is, that I must steal him away from you for two or three hours. Have I your consent, Mrs. Evelyn? and yours, Miss Fanny? Zounds! you are looking as fresh and as fair as a mountain daisy. You go to bed at seasonable hours, and that is the reason of it; while Flora is getting as late as her fashionable neighbours."

"Oh fie, uncle, don't tell tales," cried Flora.

"Indeed, but there is some truth in your uncle's observation, my dear Flora," said Mrs. Evelyn, as she glanced with affectionate anxiety at the unusually pale complexion of the young widow; "late hours will totally destroy the effect of that lovely bloom for which you were ever so remarkable. What is become of the absent rose, my sweet Flora? I protest that I never saw you look so pale."

Though Flora could very well have dispensed with this observation of Mrs. Evelyn being made in the presence of her uncle, who immediately directed his eyes towards her; and though she could very well account for the rose having lately deserted her fair cheek, yet she exerted every effort in her power to persuade

her beloved friends that she was never in better health and spirits than at the present moment, and that she could attribute her pale and languid looks this morning to nothing more than a violent head-ache, of which she had complained to her uncle when she came down stairs to breakfast, but which was now considerably relieved from the effects of her ride over to the Rectory, and the pleasure she experienced in the society of her friends! And while Flora was addressing this speech to Mrs. Evelyn and Fanny, Sir Hector had contrived to steal out of the room, taking Mr. Evelyn and even Henry along with him, which gave the ladies an opportunity of enjoying some conversation by themselves; and Flora immediately gave an account of the day she had passed at the Countess of Stormond's, and to whom she had been introduced there."

"I assure you that my uncle was highly delighted with the Earl of Clairville," uttered she. "He is, I allow, a very accomplished man, and appears to be truly amiable, although his particular attentions to me sometimes rendered his conversation fatiguing; I would say intrusively so, if the term was perfectly appropriate to a man of such polished manners and refined education. No matter, we cannot always admire those who admire us."

"True, my love," cried Mrs. Evelyn, and smiled; "yet sometimes we admire objects far less worthy of our esteem. Poor Lord Clairville, I fear, has some dangerous and powerful rival in the heart of my Flora, since being so truly amiable as she describes him to be, still she is not disposed to admire him, or accept of his attentions."

Flora coloured deeply in replying—

"You do me wrong, dear Mrs. Evelyn, in supposing that I do not appreciate merit wherever I behold it; nay, you are well assured that I do. I do admire the Earl of Clairville,—but—but—I do not—love him, and I feel well convinced that I never shall. Then what are his attentions to me? I will never receive the attentions of any man whom I do not love. I did once, but that once was to please my father. I have now no father to fetter my inclinations."

"And no husband, Flora," cried Fanny, feeling for the pain which her mother had certainly, though innocently inflicted on the heart of her lovely friend. But Fanny had pronounced this sentence in a tone so peculiarly arch, and yet so sententiously grave, that, in despite of her present feelings, which were a little mortified by the severity of Mrs. Evelyn on a subject she could so ill parry off, Flora had much difficulty in preserving the gravity of her countenance; but after a long pause, she answered—

"And no husband, Fanny; you have rightly said it: when I had, there were no sacrifices that I did not cheerfully make, to conform to his commands, and submit in all things to his authority. But why should I make sacrifices now? It is ungenerous, it is cruel to expect that I should, after the early marriage I made with my Lord Primrose,"

"Indeed it would be very cruel, Flora," sighed out the gentle Fanny; "it would be shocking too to expect that because you married an old man once in your life, to please your father, that you are to marry an old man a second time, to please your uncle!"

"Ah, but I will not do any such thing," cried Flora, speaking with increased warmth and spirit, now that Fanny had taken up the cudgel for her.

"Well, my love, there is nobody would persuade you to do any such thing," cried Mrs. Evelyn, surprised and hurt at the petulance which she had betrayed, and which was so unusual with her. "But come, recover your temper, and we will say no more about Lord Clairville. But, *apropos*, you have not yet told me how your uncle liked the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, and—and—what is the name of her accomplished nephew?"

"The Marquis of Rosalvie," quickly answered Fanny.

"Ah, you knew his name well enough, Mrs. Evelyn," cried Flora, reproachfully, and looking at Fanny again to support her against her mother's second attack of raillery; "and as to my uncle, I never once asked him how he liked the Marquis; but he is already aware that I dislike him not, and that is sufficient."

"Well, my dearest, I suspected as much," cried Mrs. Evelyn, now endeavouring to coax the half offended Flora, as gently as possible, for she was nearly provoked to tears; "but why should you be so petulant with me, my Flora, at my having discovered a secret which you have no longer the power of concealing, and yet would hide from your most attached friends? Believe me, that the object whom you honour with your regard must ever be dear to her who has ever watched over you with the fond solicitude, the tender anxiety of maternal love. All I fear is, (and Heaven grant that I may be deceived,) that the object

so dear to her, so blessed in exciting such powerful interest in her heart, is not—(pardon me, dearest Flora, if I thus openly express my doubts)—but I do indeed fear that this Marquis of Rosalvie is not so sensible of your perfections as he ought to be; or, in other words, that he loves not Flora as"——

"Flora loves him," cried Flora, with sudden and involuntary quickness, and half angry and offended again with the ingenuous candour and sincerity of her maternal monitor and friend. "And you have guessed rightly; Rosalvie does not love Flora, although Flora so dearly loves him. Well, Mrs. Evelyn, that I cannot help, you know; we often love those who love not us; but I can help letting him see that I love him, cannot I?"

"Why yes, my love, there are ways and means to do that, certainly," cried Mrs. Evelyn, heartily feeling for the situation of the young and lovely widow, and lamenting her unfortunate meeting with this young nobleman; yet wishing to soften her disappointed hopes as much as possible, she tenderly added—"Yes, my Flora has too much pride and resolution, I hope, to let any man know of the power he has obtained over her heart, whose own does not glow with mutual ardour towards her."

"It is my intention to shun the Marquis of Rosalvie as much as possible," cried Flora, with a gentle sigh. "But is absence an infallible cure for love, Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Try the experiment, my dearest," answered Mrs. Evelyn.

"So I will, dear Mrs. Evelyn," cried Flora; "I

will positively think of this Marquis no more; and though I have no doubt but the Stormond's will bring him one day to the Priory with them; (indeed, I know they will, because I have invited the Duchess:) I will behave so cold, so formal, so distant—that he shall never see that I care any thing at all about him."

"That is right, my love," cried Mrs. Evelyn, smiling, "keep to that line of conduct, and you will do."

"Promise first that you will never repeat the name of the Marquis to me again, Mrs. Evelyn."

"Not unless you compel me to do it, Flora; otherwise be assured I never will," gravely replied Mrs. Evelyn.

The mutual promise was made, witnessed by Fanny, who laughed immoderately, and was highly amused by this scene between her mother and her lovely friend; and good humour and harmony being again restored, Flora resumed her charming vivacity just in time for her uncle to witness her returning spirits and enlivening smiles.

A plain but excellent dinner was then served up; for Mr. Evelyn would not permit them to depart. Henry had the unspeakable happiness of being seated next to Fanny, and sometimes to steal a look at her without being observed even by Sir Hector, whose good-natured raillery (for it was nothing more) he most dreaded. But Sir Hector had other employment on his hands than to watch, at the present moment, the looks of the young couple; and Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn had too much confidence in their amiable child to suspect that any conversation was passing between her and the young soldier, that was not warranted by

the strictest rules of delicacy, and the purest principles of honour. Fanny had been too early taught an impressive lesson by her respected father, in infancy, to forget his valuable precepts now that she had arrived to the age of maturity; while the example of her amiable mother was constantly in her mind's eye, and her sentiments engraven on her heart.

At an early hour after dinner all the gentlemen departed. Sir Hector was going to arrange some business at Whitethorn Cottage, relative to some future provision he had in view for Mr. Llewelyn and his family; and he wished Mr. Evelyn and Henry Conway to be present on the occasion. Perhaps Henry had rather have remained where he had been so happily stationed during dinner; but this he could not do with any propriety whatever, and therefore was obliged to follow the commands of his patron, with Fanny in his head, and love in his heart, which were far more potent in their effects than the wine he had been drinking.

Meanwhile the ladies, finding they were absolutely deserted, and likely to become solitary during the whole of the evening, proposed a ramble for themselves (the weather being delightfully fine) to the cottage of a Mrs. Melville, who, with a lovely daughter, had been inhumanly deserted, and reduced to the lowest depths of poverty, by the sacrilegious monster who had married her, and then abandoned her to all the horrors of want and misery; and in this deplorable state Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn had found her and the lovely girl, who had never known a father's protection. With that compassionate kindness and warm benevo-

lence which always distinguished the worthy Rector and his amiable wife, they entered the sick chamber of the then apparently dying woman, relieved her wants, procured her medical assistance, and soothed her anguish by giving her a solemn assurance to protect her daughter, should her sufferings terminate her existence. Mrs. Melville had since recovered from the immediate attack of the disorder which momentarily threatened her life; but the medical professor assured Mr. Evelyn that her malady was incurable, and that she was progressively hastening on to that bourne from whence no traveller has ever yet returned.

This account had been daily imparted to Flora, and daily had she contributed to the wants of Mrs. Melville by her beneficence. And it was Flora's sudden inquiry after the health of the suffering invalid that reminded Mrs. Evelyn of the promise she had made her of calling on her some fine evening, when, if she found herself collected, she would inform her of the particulars of her melancholy history.

"For I have as yet but partially heard the sorrows of this most suffering creature," cried Mrs. Evelyn; "she has been too powerless to enter on the subject of those domestic misfortunes which have reduced her to the situation in which we found her. And since she has gained a little strength, I could not bear to remind her of them; delicacy has forbade me to inquire further: but this morning she expressed a wish to Mr. Evelyn to see and converse with me. He thinks her much better. The cottage is only a quarter of a mile distant; let us go, my dear Flora, and see the poor sufferer and her afflicted daughter."

"Whom Mr. Evelyn told me was a lovely young creature, and the mother a woman of elegant manners; and yet she is deserted, her and her child, by the father of the one, and the husband of the other. Dear Mrs. Evelyn, what monsters some of these men are. But come, let us instantly go, and console her all we can," added Flora, immediately rising and throwing her mantle around her. "Mrs. Evelyn, take some money with you; and you, Fanny, take all the money you have. I have most unfortunately left my purse, in my hurry, on my dressing-table. No matter—give my widow's mite to poor Mrs. Melville, and I will settle the balance of my accounts with you and your mother at another opportunity."

The request was implicitly attended to. Fanny provided herself with the whole contents of her purse, for she knew well what sort of a widow's mite agreed with the generous disposition of her lovely warm-hearted friend. And being quite ready for their benevolent expedition, the three friends set out arm in arm together on a mission that lovely woman shews loveliest, best, in her sweetest form, and most endearing to heaven, most admired on earth—the missionary angel, that whispers peace to the afflicted, and contributes to the relief of human misery.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Oh love! how are thy precious sweetest minutes
Thus ever cross'd, thus vex'd with disappointments!
Now pride, now fickleness, fantastic quarrels,
And sullen coldness, give us pain by turns."

ROWE.

ARRIVED at the cottage of Mrs. Melville, the three administering angels of pity and compassionate kindness very soon found admittance to the apartment in which the still suffering invalid and her daughter, a lovely girl, tall, elegant, and graceful, and apparently about seventeen years of age, were sitting. A faint hectic blush rested for a moment on the cheek of Mrs. Melville, and hope animated, and for a moment also brightened her languid and sunken eyes, as she uplifted them to meet the kind glances and compassionate inquiries of her generous and amiable benefactors.

"I am happy to see you so much recovered, Mrs. Melville," softly whispered Mrs. Evelyn, "and beg that you will use no further ceremony with us; but resume your seat, and remain perfectly composed and quiet; and if you are not able to talk to us, why

we will talk to you. Here is Lady Primrose, whom you have been so long impatient to behold, and my daughter; they were both anxious to inquire after your health."

"You honour me most highly, madam," exclaimed the sufferer. "Lady Primrose! and is this the Lady Primrose, that compassionate angel, to whose beneficent kindness I have been so much indebted? Amelia, look at our young and lovely benefactress: speak, speak for your mother; my heart is too full."

"Indeed, but I shall be very angry, Mrs. Melville, if either you or your daughter say a word about the matter," cried Flora, in a voice of the most fascinating sweetness, drawing her chair close to Mrs. Melville, and kindly pressing the white and emaciated hand of the patient sufferer; "we are not coming here to talk of the little services I have been so fortunate as to have it in my power to render you and Miss Melville, and which has given me the most unspeakable happiness."

"Ah, your Ladyship! and do you call those services trifling, which have prolonged the existence of a wretched mother, and soothed the thorny pillow of disease, those liberal generous benefactions, to which I owe my present quiet tranquil state? For I am in no pain; I am much, much better, and should be happy, did I not know that I must shortly leave my child, my poor innocent, delicate Amelia, without a mother's care; alas, without a father's too,—for—for—for"—

Mrs. Melville paused; and, from the shortness of her breath, it was an agonizing pause to her. No one interrupted her, for she motioned with her hand for

every one to be silent; and while a brighter hectic glow passed over her before-blanched cheek, she gradually resumed her composure; and resting her humid dark eyes full on the lovely face of Flora, she faulteringly pronounced—

"Yes, Lady Primrose, my child will have no father to protect her when I am gone, for he deserted her even before she was born."

"Barbarian!" indignantly exclaimed Flora. "But dear madam, do not, I beseech you, recal these painful images to your recollection; they are past, and cannot again return. Oh, let me hope that you will cherish happier thoughts, and that more smiling scenes and brighter prospects shall await you."

"Yes, I feel well assured, dearest lady, that brighter prospects, more smiling scenes, do await me," cried Mrs. Melville, energetically; "but ah, my Amelia! what prospects remain for her?"

The tears of Miss Melville had till this moment been restrained, not only from fear of increasing the agitation of her sick mother, but out of delicacy and respect to the feelings of her benefactors: but now they fell in torrents over her fair face and bosom; and in a voice almost inarticulate, she sobbed out—

"Dearest mamma, do not talk thus; you will break the heart of your poor Amelia, indeed you will; look too how much you have affected these dear kind and good ladies."

Amelia had bent over the side of her mother, and kissed her pale lips, which now murmured, with soft emotion—

"Forgive me,—you must all forgive me; but you

must also hear me, Mrs. Evelyn. I have promised to disclose my sad, sad history to you, and why your excellent husband discovered me and my child perishing for want, and reduced to the last stage of human misery. I promised you, dear Mrs. Evelyn, at a time when I could not accomplish the task; it was too painful, too agonizing, too throbbing to my recollection, while under the influence of bodily disease: and you would not hear of it till my mind was in a more tranquil state; yet I considered it a sacred promise, and determined that the moment I should be relieved from pain I would perform this duty to my kind and compassionate friends. For this reason I summoned you here; I told Mr. Evelyn that I wished to see you for that purpose, and requested that he would tell you so. I had previously prepared all my materials, and collected all the circumstances that I wished to make you acquainted with. It is now ready, and I am perfectly composed in mind to detail it to you. Your daughter's presence, and the compassionate angel you have brought with you will be no drawback to the confidence that I shall repose in you by a recital of the wrongs of a helpless, injured female, who, though in the character of a deserted wife and mother, has yet no cause to blush for herself, but mourn over the misfortunes, while she must forgive the author of her miseries. Yes, guilty as he is, when I look at that innocent angel, of whom he is the father, I feel inclined to drop a tear over his frailties, and remembering only that he is the father of my Amelia, pardon and forgive him.

"Now, Mrs. Evelyn, you have my reasons for so

earnestly wishing to behold you. A period may arrive, (and I feel it hourly approaching,) when this wish and this request may be unavailing. You understand me; I have no affectation in wishing to deceive my friends, or fill with delusive hopes and expectations the heart of that affectionate, exemplary child. I am better; it would be the height of ingratitude, of impiety, to say that I am not; but—but—you may guess the rest, my beloved friends. I would spare the pangs which now rend the bosom of my Amelia: but she is surrounded by angels of compassion, and will better sustain the shock which she would receive, were I to tell her without their presence, that ere long she will be motherless. I can never recover. Amelia, my darling, it is useless to deceive you; cherish not a hope that I shall long be with you; and let the present moments be passed in teaching my child the lesson of fortitude. It is not the first, Amelia, that I have taught you; learn to bear it, and dry those tears which only now add to my sufferings, and pierce my heart with anguish insupportable."

Amelia sobbed aloud. She had thought her mother not only better, but perfectly recovered from her indisposition. She had fancied too, from the hectic flush in her face, and the return of her appetite, that she was hourly gaining strength and spirits. To be awakened from this ecstatic and transporting thought, and from her own lips to hear the fatal truth, was indeed a shock too great for her youthful mind to bear; and sinking on the shoulder of Mrs. Evelyn, she wept with increased anguish, while Flora endeavoured, by every soothing means in her power, to pacify and console the

half frantic girl; and the tenderest attentions, both of Mrs. Evelyn and the gentle Fanny, were directed to the agitated suffering mother, and at length they succeeded. Amelia was assured by Mrs. Evelyn and the kind-hearted Flora, that in the fears that her mother had so awfully foreboded, she should never stand in need of friends or protection, and conjuring her to recover her self-possession as much as possible in the presence of her suffering parent. They had the pleasure of soon perceiving that their attentions were not thrown away upon the lovely girl, nor their excellent advice neglected.

Meanwhile tea was got in readiness, and the amiable Fanny assisted on the occasion, with a sweetness and affability, and with such delicacy to the wounded feelings both of the mother and her daughter, that Flora felt that there was nothing could endear her lovely friend more to her heart than this noble display of engaging manners and disposition.

But no persuasions could induce Mrs. Melville to postpone her narrative to some other opportunity. She declared that she not only felt perfectly composed, but enlivened by the conversation of her charming friends; and desiring her daughter to give her a folded paper, which was carefully deposited in a small cabinet, she spread it before her on the table, and heaving a gentle sigh, addressed her compassionate auditors in the following affecting and impressive manner:—

"While yet in the earliest dawn of infancy, I was a helpless orphan, left to the sole care and guardianship of a maiden aunt. But never did aunt so truly exemplify the tender duties of an affectionate mother; for

when I left school, and came wholly to reside with her, she permitted me to reign mistress with the most unlimited indulgence over her family and house, which consisted of a small neat-built cottage, containing two bed-chambers, a parlour, and a kitchen. An old faithful domestic, whom she called Lucilla, was the only servant we had; but we had other companions, two pigs, a cat, and a fat owl, which my aunt had selected for her favourite, in spite of all my endeavours to laugh her out of it. I must not omit, however, to remark, that my aunt did not devote the whole of her time to her owl; she had a well-chosen library, in which was a selection of ancient and modern works, and books of literature, fancy, and taste, arranged with great order and precision by her own hands.

"She was no less curious in her garden, which was plentifully stored with fruit, flowers, and herbs of every description, the virtues and qualities of which she had long known, and universally practised in the village, sometimes using them as an healing balm for the sick, at another time making them as nutriment for the poor.

"Though my aunt was an old maid, she seemed so truly happy in that condition, that since I married, I have often reflected on her calm and tranquil life, her cheerful spirits, and uninterrupted state of happiness, and deplored my own choice with many heart-felt sighs.

"Such was my aunt, Amelia Fitzallan, the old maid, when I, a young, artless, and inexperienced girl, was placed at the head of her little household. At this period she informed me I was indebted to her, and her

alone, for those advantages which I had derived from education; that I was the child of a brother whom she had loved with the most unbounded affection; that my mother, in giving me birth, had paid the forfeit of her own life; and that she had promised my father, who survived my mother but a few months, that she would fulfil, in her protection and care of me, all those sacred duties of which death had deprived me in my maternal parent.

"'And I believe, my dear Catharine,' said this affectionate aunt, while tears glistened in her eyes, 'that I have, to the utmost of my power, discharged this duty, and supplied, in all that I was able, the tender care and attention of your mother. While I live,' added she, 'the rest of my days will be devoted to make you happy. At my death, you will inherit the little all that I possess; and I shall die contented in the thought that my darling Catherine will not be left destitute.'

"At these words, which contained a strong testimony of my aunt's regard, I burst into tears. She was in no less degree affected; and we supped together on that evening with less cheerfulness than usual. The night was succeeded by a morning of the most transcendent beauty, in nature's happiest season. I awoke at an early hour, and leaving my aunt in sweet and undisturbed repose, prepared to take my accustomed walk before breakfast, Lucilla having charged me not to stay too long. I tied on a straw hat, and hanging a basket on my arm, with the intention of gathering some wild strawberries, of which I knew my aunt was extremely fond, set out on my ramble; and while contemplating the blessed sun, beneath whose

cheering influence I grew elated, and was supremely happy; I felt that to be England's queen I would not exchange my then innocent and blissful state. Ah hapless Catherine! it was for the last time under that sun you were destined to possess such enviable feelings, the last time that dove-like peace was to inhabit your then pure and artless breast.

"Suffer me to pause, dear Mrs. Evelyn, dear Lady Primrose, but for a moment, over this ecstatic period of my youthful days," tremulously, and now almost faintly, pronounced Mrs. Melville, "when tyrant passion and merciless man were alike strangers to my bosom. And oh! should one drop of contrition fall to banish the pleasing retrospection, still these days of innocence and bliss will rise superior to my recollection, when, fresh in youthful health and ardent fancy, I plucked the rose of hope, and found it disencumbered of a thorn.

"But to proceed. After having rambled for near an hour in the field, amusing myself sometimes with making nosegays of wild flowers, and having filled my basket with a sufficient quantity of strawberries, I approached a little wicket gate, which I knew had often conducted me to my dear aunt's cottage, but was surprised and disappointed to find on this morning that it was fastened by a padlock. I had no alternative, therefore, but to return by the way I came, and was about to turn back, when a young man in a shooting dress, with two dogs, appeared at the gate. He unlocked it; but whether he imagined that I wished to pass that way, knowing it to be a short cut into the village, or whether impelled by curiosity to learn who

I was, I cannot tell; but in a voice of the most fascinating sweetness, he inquired if I had lost my way, or wished to pass through the gate to go to the village. I knew not what I replied, for the look he directed towards me overwhelmed me with confusion, and in the words of the old song,

"I blush'd, and could not tell why."

I have often since thought that the first impressive glance of Robert Melville, from that moment determined the complection of my fate.

"I was at this period but seventeen; and notwithstanding the many efforts which my dear aunt had made to divest me of personal vanity, I am sorry to add that I was possessed of no inconsiderable share. I had not once forgot that when at school my beauty was extolled beyond that of all my other playmates, and that my sunday frock and little straw gipsey hat were put on by my partial governess with more than ordinary taste; and as I tript to church by her side, my heart fluttered with delight as I heard the rapturous exclamation—'What a handsome girl is Catherine Fitzallan.' This, and similar sentences pronounced in my hearing, became the groundwork of that excessive vanity which could not afterwards be eradicated; and the glowing looks of admiration with which the handsomest young man I had ever beheld surveyed me, in no small degree contributed to increase it.

"By what means we commenced a conversation, which lasted till I found myself within twenty yards of my dear aunt's cottage, I could never yet surmise; but

I was spell-bound by the witchery of his tongue, and fascinated by the more seducing graces of his person. Conscious that I was committing an impropriety which could not be readily excused, and shocked that I had not only imprudently permitted him to walk so far with me, but afterwards suffered him to continue a conversation, the subject of which was but oblique praises to myself, I suddenly stopped short, and dropping him a curtsey, abruptly bade him good morning. He looked surprised, and, as I thought, reproachfully; but exclaimed, as he left me—

"'I go instantly, at your command, madam; but I shall bear along with me your beauteous image; and though your breast be cold to me as the Alpine snows, yet the recollection of this morning will cheer me in a far distant country, will emulate me in a glorious cause; and while life flows in the fountain of this beating heart, you will be dear, oh, most inexpressibly dear, to Robert Melville.'

"With these words he left me; but with such sensations, that I mentally exclaimed—He goes then to battle, and I shall never see him more; he will expire on the ensanguined field. Who shall watch over him in that eventful hour? But the tears, the sighs, the prayers of Catherine will attend him. Already I fancied myself the most cruel being in existence, and I entered the peaceful abode of my aunt, the innocent, but no longer the happy Catherine I had quitted it. My bosom was already possessed of a guest which was dangerous to my repose. Love had found a passport to my till then peaceful breast, and having once settled there was never afterwards to be erased. My disor-

dered looks and pale countenance attracted the attention and excited the apprehensions of my tender aunt; and to her repeated inquiries of 'What ails my darling Catherine?' I could reply not a word, till tears shed from her affectionate eyes recalled me to a sense of my duty. I started from my seat, threw my arms around her neck, and hiding my face in her bosom, sobbed aloud—'Forgive your Catherine, for though innocent, she is guilty'——

"'Guilty!' said my aunt, turning pale, and in the utmost alarm; 'of what are you guilty, my dear child? That you are innocent, it has long been my pride to know; that you are guilty, I never can believe, though uttered from your own lips. Speak, Catherine, and ease at once my anxious doubts and apprehensions.'

"'Upon my soul and my salvation,' added Lucilla, wringing her hands, 'but I believe she has seen a man, mistress, and sure I know there is little good comes of that; for man is the devil, and the devil has bewitched her.'

"At this insinuation of old Lucilla, my aunt desired her, though with much mildness, to leave the room; and then, not in the least deviating from the truth, I disclosed to her every particular of my morning's adventure with Robert Melville, bitterly reflecting on my own want of propriety; and, in the fulness of my heart, as bitterly lamenting my cruelty, by having so abruptly dismissed him from the gate. 'For only think, my dear aunt,' cried I, 'if he should go to the field of battle.'

"'As many others have done before him,' calmly replied she.

"'But if he should fall?' repeated I, mournfully.

"'Which is not in the least unlikely,' quickly replied my aunt.

"This observation I thought cruel in the extreme; and telling her so, my aunt, as I suspect, now deemed it highly necessary to exert a little of that authority which she was conscious she had a right over me, and which she had hitherto used so sparingly.

"'Catherine Fitzallan,' said she, with a gravity in her manner which I never observed before, 'you have seriously incurred my displeasure; you have departed, for the first time in your life, from the line of prudence, and over-stepped, as I may call it, the bounds of decorum and modesty which are, and ever will be, the brightest ornaments that can adorn our sex. To admit a stranger to your conversation, was, at the first, both indelicate and indiscreet; and to permit his attending you home, altogether improper; but, rash girl, where shall I find words to express my surprise, my astonishment, my indignation, that you should so suddenly lean to the impulse of passion, and receive to your bosom, woman's first, woman's last, and ever will be, woman's most destructive foe.'

"'Dear aunt,' returned I, not fully comprehending her meaning, 'what foe?'

"'Love,' repeated she; 'love, that bane of all human joys, that enemy to repose, which looks like the innocent flower, but bears the serpent under it. Cherish its illusions, and they will deceive you; fly from its allurements, and you will be safe. Oh Catherine! child of my hopes, pride of my heart, thus far have I proceeded to warn you of your danger. Consider

yourself on the brink of a precipice; reflect that one unlucky step may hurl you to the bottom, from which not all my tears, my prayers, my exertions, can rescue you. Think then, Catherine, I charge you, think, that you see me weep for your indiscretion—that I fall a victim to my grief—and, dying of a broken heart, your unhappy aunt shall at last'——

"An involuntary shriek, at these words, burst from my agonized lips. The picture she had drawn was heart-breaking beyond description. That I should in any degree be instrumental to the death of this tender relation, who had supplied to me more than a mother's care, appeared to me the most dreadful crime I could commit; and instantly falling on my knees, I implored my aunt's forgiveness, renouncing all sentiments in favour of Robert Melville, and promising most sacredly that I would never behold him more.

"'Now then you are again my own darling Catherine,' cried she, tenderly kissing my cheek.

"The subject was never afterwards resumed; for though the name of Robert was deeply imprinted on my heart, I never suffered it to escape my lips; nor did I ever stir from the side of my aunt, either at home or abroad, taking care, in my walks, to avoid that path, of all others, which led to the wicket gate where I first beheld him. But such was the strange, the uncommon fatality he possessed over my senses, that notwithstanding I took all these precautious, he was never absent for a moment from my thoughts; and often ruminating, when alone in my chamber, on my aunt's singular sentiments on the subject of love, I have pettishly exclaimed—'How ridiculous is this dear

aunt of mine! If love is so dangerous, why do so many cherish its impressions? And if matrimony be attended with the evils described, why do so many people marry? I wished to have these questions resolved; but had previously settled it in my own mind, that neither love nor matrimony could be improper, while thousands offered up their liberty at its shrine.

"Such were my reflections, when, one beautiful autumnal evening, as my aunt and I sat at work in a little arbour at the end of the garden, a message was brought to her, requiring her immediate presence, to attend a sick neighbour. With all that innate goodness which invariably marked her character, she answered the summons, leaving me in charge of the house till she should return. At her departure, I again resumed my work; and positively my thoughts had not, on that evening, once strayed towards an object which memory in vain urged me to forget; but I fancied, as I sat thus employed, that a more than usual rustling agitated the thick foliage by which I was surrounded. It increased; and as I listened, a tremor possessed my whole frame. I was apprehensive, yet knew not why; and as the last rays of the setting sun were declining fast, I folded up my work, with the intention of quitting the arbour, when a voice, which seemed to breathe more than mortal melody, sung the following words to a plaintive air:—

"Since cold is the maid whom my bosom adores,
Ah! cold, cold as the waves of the sea,
Adieu then, for ever, my dear native shores;
What can fortune avail now to me?

"Come, come to the willow, thou cold cruel maid,
When the clock shall strike one, two, and three;
Oh come to the willow, beneath whose pale shade
Robert he died—for love and for thee."

The two last lines of the second stanza were repeated with so peculiar an emphasis, that spell-bound, (for well might I deem it so,) I became rivetted to the spot; and raising my eyes in search of the object from whence such harmony proceeded, I encountered once more the fatally ecstatic glance of Robert Melville. He was silent, embarrassed, and confused. I would have flown on his first advancing towards me, but his pale countenance attracted my attention; and no sooner had he pronounced, 'Have I the unspeakable joy of beholding you once again?' than the work, which I had put into a basket, fell from my trembling arm. In vain I attempted to speak; my quivering lips refused their office, and I sunk into a seat, wholly overpowered by sensations which I had not the courage to suppress.

"Sensibility! fatal gift! how often have I reviled thee as the source of all the misfortunes I have ever known. A secret monitor whispered—'Catherine, remember your promise to your aunt; never more converse with this object, so seducing to your senses, so dangerous to your repose.' But again had I caught the sweet vibration of his voice, that voice which having once heard, I could never afterwards forget; and my aunt, her gentle remonstrance, her strong interest for my fate—all that she had ever said to me, instantaneously vanished from my mind. I saw before me him on whom my soul doated; and forgetting that

there existed another being in the world beside him, I burst into tears, while, in tones of the deepest despondency, he uttered—

"'Farewell, madam. I perceive how utterly you despise and abandon me, and will never more offend you by my presence. Yes, inflexible and cruel Catherine, you can indeed behold unmoved the anguish by which I am torn; you feel not the pangs of eternal separation. Adieu, then, Miss Fitzallan; farewell for ever.'

"I trembled, and turned pale, more conscious than ever that the tenderness I felt for him was gaining ground every instant; and as he was leaving me, I replied, in a voice which too strongly marked my affection—'Robert, I do not, I can never hate you.' These words, so hastily pronounced, produced a sudden revolution in the countenance and manner of Robert Melville. He flew towards me with an ecstasy not to be described.

"'You love me, Catherine,' returned he. 'Ah, deny it not; you love me, and I am blest.'

"Ah! faint were my efforts to paint the vivid colouring, as I then imagined, of ardent love, which animated every feature; for every look of Robert Melville was formed to captivate, to flatter, and oh! to betray the heart of the woman who confided in him. What shall I say, my friends? How shall I confess my weakness? But wherefore should I not? Years, many tedious, long suffering, and lingering years have passed away since my miseries have expiated for this my first and only proof of early indiscretion. My bosom has long ceased to beat with love, and my heart will never

more rest its visionary hopes on the protection of man.

"But to proceed. Robert drew from my trembling lips a frank confession of my regard; and as he pressed my hand to his heart, his triumph was complete. He bade me adieu, on this ever-to-be-remembered evening, his eyes sparkling with the most dazzling brilliancy.

"'And will my Catherine, will my lovely Catherine consent to be my wife in three days from this period?' Remarking my agitation, he continued, 'Three days in love's calendar are three whole lengthened years; say then, mistress of my soul, at the expiration of three days you will be mine—mine by a husband's right, the tenderest, the most sacred of all human ties.'

"'Sacred indeed!' replied I; 'so sacred, Robert, that I dare not promise you till I have consulted one whose commands I have disobeyed. She is all goodness, and yet I have abused it. But though I have given my heart, never will I dispose of my hand till sanctioned with her approbation, till ratified with her full consent.'

"'But should she withhold it,' said Robert, in the utmost despair. 'Make me not blest by halves; say at once that I shall be supremely so; let no earthly power divide us after three days are at end.'

"Robert smiled, and his smile was fascination. I trembled—faultered—but pronounced, 'Yes.' As soon as he left me, I shuddered at my imprudence, and I thought of my dear aunt with emotions that added compunction and remorse to all my other sensations;

and if, as I expected, she should return to supper, I knew not how to conceal from her observing eye the agitation I was suffering. At one moment I resolved to make a confidant of Lucilla, and disclose to her the whole affair; but recollecting that she subscribed to my aunt's opinion on every occasion, abandoned all thought of so hazardous a discovery. Before I had summoned up courage to venture into my aunt's little parlour, I observed Lucilla coming to meet me. Her first exclamation was—

"'The Lord be good unto me, a sinner, child! What hast been doing so long by theeself in the garden? Why thee lookest as white as a turnip. What hast thee been doing, I say?'

"'Doing, Lucilla?' replied I, frightened to death at the earnestness with which she surveyed me; 'doing, Lucilla?' and I attempted to smile; but I was so poor a dissembler at this happy state of my life, that I almost cried while I took out my pocket handkerchief, and said, 'I have got a cold, Lucilla.'

"'By my faith hast thou,' answered she. 'Thee must have a bason of water-gruel, and go thy ways to bed.'

"'That I would, most willingly,' replied I; 'but my aunt will return to supper, will not she, Lucilla?'

"'Dost thee not know that when she is comforting the sick, she careth not for supper nor dinner neither?' said Lucilla. 'The heavens bless her;—she will watch and pray to night by the side of poor old Janet; she sent me word that the doctor says she cannot live till morning. Well, well, 'tis a sinful world, that be certain; sinful sorrow, mortal grieving, and good-for-

nothing people, that be all this world is come to now-a-days.'

"Lucilla had recourse to the corner of her apron, to wipe her eyes, while she delivered this oration; and my feelings at this time being so exactly in unison with hers, my tears, which I could not restrain, and which (oh, shame to say!) proceeded from a different cause, flowed abundantly the more, when Lucilla drew from her bosom a paper written in my dear aunt's hand, containing the following words:—

"'Dearest Catherine,

"'Well aware of your affectionate solicitude, I fear you have been anxiously awaiting my return; but my dear girl must not forget, there are calls on the duties of humanity which at no time of my life I have been unmindful of—my duty to the sick, and comforting, in the best manner that I am able, the broken-hearted and the expiring Christian. Should poor Janet survive, expect me home to breakfast. In the mean time do not neglect yourself, but let Lucilla prepare you something comfortable for your supper. And may your repose, my dear child, be that of a fervent and meek spirit, grateful for the blessings you enjoy, and cheerful from the result of a pure and innocent heart. Thus prays your affectionate aunt,

"'*Amelia Fitzallan.*'

"No criminal arraigned at the bar of justice felt more than I did on the perusal of this letter. I sobbed aloud. 'Pure and innocent heart!' repeated I; 'was ever heart so false, so deceitful?' Lucilla stared at

me with a mixture of surprise, astonishment, and concern.

"'What ailest thee, child?' uttered she, 'and what dost cry for? Thee be good and innocent, and what dost weep for? Thou wilt never want a friend while mistress lives; then why dost thee lament?'

"I dared not explain to Lucilla the nature of my affliction; and I determined in the morning no longer to remain the guilty creature I then thought myself, but, by unburthening my sentiments to my aunt, relieve my overcharged heart by a full confession of my interview with Robert. I rested my sole hope on her mild forgiving temper; and having brought my mind to a state of composure, retired to bed, comforted by Lucilla's specific for low spirits—a bason of water-gruel. One intruder alone disturbed my pillow; it was Robert Melville.

"After a sleepless night, feverish, oppressed, and every way dissatisfied with my conduct, I arose, and, to divert my melancholy thoughts, assisted Lucilla in preparing the breakfast, at which I expected my so much dreaded, yet tenderly beloved aunt; but she returned not till dinner time, and then, as I imagined, appeared languid and fatigued. Poor old Janet had paid the debt of nature, and I attributed my aunt's low spirits to the awful scene she had just witnessed: but I was mistaken; for desiring me to make a cup of coffee, she requested I would seriously attend to something of moment she had to communicate. I felt my heart sink within me as she affectionately pronounced—

"'I do not feel well, Catherine, and am otherwise unhappy on your account; having received certain

hints, which, though they do not surprise, exceedingly afflict me.' Perceiving that I could not reply, she paused, and casting a look expressive of the tenderest affection, continued—'I do not command you, Catherine, I only implore you to regard my exhortations on a subject which I am apprehensive has already engrossed too much of your thoughts. Alas! how long I may be spared to give you my advice, is uncertain.'

"I burst into tears; but a consciousness of error kept me wholly absorbed in reflection.

"'You will be surprised,' repeated my aunt, 'when I tell you that I have conversed for near an hour with this rare phœnix of perfection, this Robert Melville.'

"As my aunt smiled when she uttered the word phœnix, I gathered courage; my terrors forsook me, and I exclaimed in an ecstasy—'Have you indeed, my dear aunt? Is it possible that you have both seen and conversed with Robert Melville?'

"'Romantic enthusiast!' cried my aunt, again relapsing into severity, 'now do I feel it my duty to awaken you from a delusive dream, which never can be realized; for'——

CHAPTER XX.

"Oh memory! thou fond deceiver,
Still unfortunate and vain,
To former joys recurring ever,
And turning all the past to pain;
Thou, like the world, th' oppress'd oppressing,
Thy smiles increase the wretch's woe;
And she who wants each other blessing,
In thee must ever find a foe."

GOLDSMITH.

"'——FOR,' continued my aunt, 'know, that this idol of your youthful heart, this rare phœnix of perfection, this Robert Melville, is no other than the illegitimate offspring of the perfidious Lord Warrington! he who deserted a lovely and amiable wife, to revel in the arms of a shameless and abandoned wanton. The inhuman father and the sacrilegious husband both are combined in the person of Lord Warrington; and never let it be said that Catherine Fitzallan, of no ignoble birth, and exalted in virtue, will ever unite herself with one who owns connection with so base a monster.'

"'And with whom does Lord Warrington at present reside?' uttered I, thunderstruck by intelligence so unlooked for and so unpleasing.

"'Doubtless with the creature for whom he has abandoned a virtuous and lovely wife,' uttered my aunt, with increased warmth, on perceiving that this intelligence had not sufficient influence over my mind to erase the image of the idol I still adored from my fond and infatuated heart. "And hear me, Catherine; when the dove woos for his mate the ravenous kite,—then shall Catherine Fitzallan become the wife of Robert Melville,—then shall Catherine Fitzallan obtain the consent of Amelia Fitzallan to wed the illegitimate son of the infamous Lord Warrington.'

"I own that for awhile my predilection to enter into the state of matrimony was checked, nay, intimidated with the prospect I had in view of becoming the wife of Robert Melville, under circumstances so disreputable; and without asking my aunt from whence she had gained such information, I solemnly gave her my promise that I would never more listen to the solicitations of Robert Melville without her sanction, or without her consent.

"'Then you are my own darling Catherine again,' uttered she, 'and I shall hold you dearer to my heart than ever.'

"But alas! what are woman's resolutions, when her heart and her inclinations are no longer under the power of self-control? I had promised more than I could perform; and though I never whispered the name of Robert Melville in the hearing of my aunt, yet he was ever uppermost in my thoughts. I know

not by what fascination he held this power over my senses, and why the passion I had conceived for him so triumphed in my heart; but so it was: to forget Robert Melville was to forget a part of my existence; and often, as I sat alone with my aunt, he was the theme of conversation, whether she liked it or not. I frequently asked her if a child was answerable for the indiscretions of a parent; to which, after a pause, she generally replied—

"'Surely not. Were that the case, my dear Catherine, how many innocent, unoffending beings would become responsible for the faults of the guilty objects to whom they owe their existence. Still I would have my Catherine reflect that it is not necessary to seek connections so disgraceful, when more honourable ones may meet her choice.'

"At the mere supposition of my being attached to any object but my soul's still adored, I indignantly replied—

"'No, I shall never love, never prefer another, though he had the wealth of Indian mines, to him who first caught my youthful fancy. Dear aunt, cease to talk thus; I can never love but one, and that one is Robert Melville.'

"And so it proved—ah, too fatally to me it proved, and was to me as fatally verified; for in a very few weeks from the period of the conversation I had held with my dear affectionate relative, a servant in the livery of the Earl of Warrington delivered a note at the gate of our humble cottage, addressed to Mrs. Fitzallan, (for so was my aunt called, from her long having renounced any pretensions to the title of Miss,)

and that note, to our utter astonishment, was from Robert Melville himself, and couched in the following terms:—

"'Madam,

"'The death of a fond indulgent mother, who has left me independent of a father's parsimony, or even his authority, now induces me to offer my hand and heart for the acceptance of your lovely niece. Ah, do not now deny me the privilege of a fond lover in approaching her, and calling her mine by the more honourable title of a fond husband. I have wealth far beyond the wishes of my adored Catherine; for I have often heard her say that riches were incompatible with happiness, and with that domestic happiness which is the basis of connubial felicity, and of honourable and chaste affection, such as I profess towards my lovely Catherine. Admit me then, madam, without fear or jealousy, to approach her whom my heart adores; admit me as the affianced husband of your beauteous niece, without whom life would be deprived of its sweetest charm, and existence only a burthen. One single word pronounced from your lips will seal my happiness or sign my passport to misery. I wait with an impatience and anxiety not to be expressed to learn the result of your final determination of the future destiny of your most respectful and humble suppliant,

"'*Robert Henry Melville.*'

"After having very eagerly devoured the whole contents of this precious billet, which I thought the most eloquent I had ever seen, my aunt, half smiling at the

agitation which my countenance betrayed, ironically exclaimed—

"'Well, Catherine, are you prepared to receive this lover of yours, who seems so honourable in his affection towards you, or do you feel inclined to reject him?'

"'Reject him! ah, surely, dear aunt, you cannot intend to be so cruel,' uttered I, with dismay and astonishment. 'What can be more fair and honourable than his professions? his love, what more ardent and sincere?'

"To which she gravely, and, as I thought, somewhat mournfully replied—

"'The professions of men, my dearest Catherine, however fair or seemingly honourable, have yet a colour of deception; like leaves of blushing roses, they oft conceal the wily serpent, that lurks beneath them; and so may Melville, shouldst thou trust too faithfully his vows of love.'

"'I cannot doubt such ingenuous and frank confession,' uttered I; 'he loves me, and would bestow on me the most endearing of all human and sacred titles—a wife: beside, you hear, dear aunt, that he is independent of his father; he has wealth, and that wealth he is willing to share with your Catherine, who has so little. What answer will you reply to so kind a letter, and so flattering a proposal, dear aunt?'

"'Nay, don't suppose that I will have any thing to do with the matter,' answered she, bridling up with maidenly pride and forced severity, (for my aunt was not naturally severe;) 'a pretty thing, indeed, for such as me to have to answer love letters,—I who never

thought of such a thing in all my born days, and never dreamt of it. No, verily, child, if this love epistle need be answered, thou must perform that task thyself. Come, set about it directly, and do not keep the man that brought it cooling his heels in the kitchen; though I hope Lucilla has not been wanting in courtesy to offer him some refreshment; he must needs be weary after so long a walk, and I trust my doors were never yet shut on hospitality when a stranger crossed the threshold.'

"'I will go and see what Lucilla has given him,' uttered I, 'and then I will answer this delightful letter. But how shall I begin it, dear aunt?'

"'Thee be as silly a toad as ever lived, Catherine,' cried my aunt, unable to resist smiling at my impatience; 'as if thee did not know what to say; what thy heart tells thee in such an affair.'

"'Ah, but may I say *all* that my heart tells me?' cried I, in the most coaxing accent, on perceiving that I had gained ground in the opinion of my dear aunt instead of losing it, by this frank confession of my feelings; "may Robert Melville be invited hither, and in the character he so strongly solicits? If not, aunt, it were better not to invite him at all. I must have your decided answer.'

"'Must you, Miss pert?' cried my aunt, now laughing; 'why, then, I suppose the fellow must come, if it were only to be introduced to a comical old maid; for such I am, you know, to all intents and purposes: so begin without further ceremony, and tell him I shall be glad of his company to take a bit of dinner, and a cup of tea; and mayhap, if I like him, I,

may chance to treat him with a glass of my gooseberry wine that I bottled up last Christmas. You may tell him all this, if you please, Catherine; and as much as you may please, in all due decorum of a maiden's modesty.'

"Delighted with not only the good humour of my dear affectionate relative, but with the approbation she so strongly manifested of the conduct of my adored Robert, I immediately sat down, and wrote what my full heart so fondly dictated in answer to his affectionate epistle, which, being little versed in letters, I thought was a masterpiece of nature's eloquence. It ran thus:—

"'Catherine Fitzallan is commanded by her aunt, who has received Mr. Melville's polite note, to inform him that she will be glad of his company to dinner to-morrow, and will prepare her little cottage to welcome and receive him as the friend of Catherine Fitzallan on such an occasion.'

"'Alas! how cold was this short hasty note, to express the nature of my feelings; yet my aunt had dwelt so much on maidenly modesty, that I dared not venture a step beyond what I imagined she would ultimately subscribe to. Yet after the note was despatched, as she trotted off to the kitchen, she could not help muttering to herself,—

"'"Prepare our little cottage to receive him! Mighty pretty indeed, Miss Catherine; as if the cottage was not good enough to receive the son of——No matter, I am marvellously fond of one of King Charles's golden

rules, and by my faith it is a wise proverb—Never to repeat old grievances. Come, Lucy, stir thee, old wench, and get out the best damask table-cloth, and the silver-handled knives and forks, which I remember have never been in use since the day that Kate was christened, and my best tea-caddee, full of hyson tea. Then I must put on my crimson satin gown, and my lace lappets, which so exceedingly become me; one surely need not look ugly, though one is old.'

"'Lord, missus, what matters it whether thee be old or young, while thee be good and virtuous!' cried Lucilla, dusting the chairs and the tables with increased alacrity, and sometimes throwing a glance at me as I was paring some apples, with no very pleasing aspect; 'beauty be a mortal troublesome thing to some folks; though I can look back to the good-looking day, missus, when thee was as pretty as Miss Catherine.'

"'Well, well, I don't want to hear any thing about that,' retorted my aunt; 'I only want things put to rights, and a little bit smartish, that's all; I don't want the house to look like a pig-sty, as the saying is, when Mr. Melville comes: Catherine, where is the blue slip I bought thee last summer? Thee must put it on, child, because it doth become thy complexion.'

"All these orders I heard, and many more issued, with transports I could ill conceal; and the next morning, when at my toilet, how partially did I survey the charms with which I had been told that nature so liberally endowed me; and placing a wreath of rosebuds in my hair, I mentally exclaimed—'Ah, surely love is the sweetest of all human sensations. Who talks of its doubts, its jealousies, or its fears? I have no fear,

save that of losing the affections of the being I adore; and may that fear never be my lot to know.'

"At length I was attired; and the only fault that my aunt found was, that my bosom was not so closely shaded as decorum required; which remark met, to my great surprise and astonishment, with a dissenting voice from Lucilla.

"'Lauk-a-day, missus,' uttered she, 'because thee be an old maid thyself, I do verily believe thee do want the child to be one too.'

"'Of which, had I formed any such notion, I am apt to think that I shall be greatly mistaken,' cried my aunt, smiling with the most good-natured simplicity; at the same moment that she lamented that Mr. Melville was not true to his appointment, that the turkey would be over-roasted, and the chine over-boiled.

"But at length, in an elegant travelling chariot, our expected visitant arrived. My aunt flew to receive him with all due form and ceremony, while I trembled as he approached me, and hailed me in the most rapturous terms of praise. Ah! even in that moment, the happiest and most transporting of my whole existence, I felt insensibly a shuddering sensation suddenly creeping through my heart, for which I was then indeed wholly unable to account; for on Robert pronouncing, 'We meet now, my adored Catherine, to part no more,' I was near fainting; an ashy paleness had overspread my cheek, my lips quivered, and I panted for breath as I drooped my head on the shoulder of my dear aunt.

"But these emotions shortly subsided, and transport of the most delightful and ecstatic kind filled my

heart. Robert was all that fond heart could wish: high in the good graces of my aunt, he prevailed on her to yield her consent to our union as speedily as possible; and within the period of three months, already had he provided a residence for my reception. It was not far distant from our cottage, the property of a gentleman just gone to India, and the furniture was tasteful and elegantly neat. It was called Fitzallan House, in compliment to my dear aunt: and it was agreed that she should pass her days there, and sleep only at the cottage, which was her favourite retreat. For six months that she continued to be our guest, I was the happiest and most envied of women, as Robert was considered the most blest of men. But why is happiness so uncertain, or human expectations so vain? Ask rather, why the canker-worm doth feed upon the rose, and despoil it of its smiling bloom?

"But to proceed. I had been the wife of Robert Melville nearly six months, and Fitzallan House was still the abode of domestic joy and peace; during which time my husband often received letters from Ireland, and returned answers, without my being acquainted with their purport; and as I concluded they were from his father, Lord Warrington, delicacy forbade me to inquire into the subject, conceiving that the correspondence held between a father and his child should be sacred. One day after dinner, however, as I was sitting at work with my aunt, letters, as usual, arrived by the Dublin mail. On opening one of them, I perceived that my husband evidently changed colour, and that a universal trepidation seized his whole frame, though he endeavoured to conceal it: but love, true

love catches at the slightest alarm that would tend to destroy its sweet influence over the constant mind; and breathless with anxiety and impatience, I flew into those arms which were ever wont to receive me with unutterable affection, and hastily I demanded to know the cause of the uneasiness which had so suddenly disquieted his mind; but with a look which froze my inmost soul, he threw me from him, and coldly desired me to desist from such childish and trifling behaviour.

"'For there is nothing at all in the letters that I have received of any consequence,' uttered he, 'more than the wish that old dad has expressed to see me in —Dublin. I shall certainly take a trip—over to see old dad;—must not cross him, you know—or I shall get none of the ready rhino. I must please dad; so—I suppose you must let me go for a month or so—wilt thou, Kate?'

"'A month or so, Robert?' exclaimed I; 'I could as soon be separated from you a twelvemonth as a month.'

"'You are a fool,—a pretty idiot,' uttered he. 'Pray, madam, take care of your spoiled child: I positively never saw such a simpleton—cannot part with her nabby only for a month. Oh fie, Catherine! tears too,—I am quite ashamed of you.'

"Unused to this mode of treatment, as well as unaccustomed to such cruel and unmeaning raillery, I threw myself on the bosom of my dear aunt, and sobbed bitterly.

"'I never saw such a brute, I protest,' cried my aunt, and left us together, in order, for my sake, that she might not yield to the momentary sensations of

anger with which he had inspired her. And whether ashamed that he had so deeply wounded my feelings, or in the apprehension that he had offended my affectionate relative, I know not, but he attempted now to calm and sooth the perturbation of mind and spirits he had occasioned; assured that he had only been jesting, and asked me seriously if I had any objection to his going over to Ireland to settle some arrangements with his father, who had more motives than one for inviting him thither.

"'Besides, what have you to fear, Catherine,' uttered he, 'by my absence? I shall return full of cash, and full of glee, my girl. Old dad, if I keep him in temper, will leave me some thousands; and egad, I must please him, come what may.'

"I was then obliged with tears to confess, that under present circumstances I did not like to be separated from him, and that in all probability he would, in a few succeeding months, become a father.

"'Well, and what of that?' uttered he; 'you don't expect me to stay and nurse the bantling, do you?'

"'I shall want every thing in the attention of my husband,' cried I.

"But Robert smiled, and his smile was fascination. My aunt came in, and he soon contrived to be reinstated in her good graces again; they played a game at chess, and the journey to Ireland was talked of no more. Fitzallan House once more became the seat of happiness and peace.

"But peace was not long the inmate of our happy dwelling: for one morning, as I was placing some flowers in the vases, I perceived Lucilla crumpling

something like a folded letter into her bosom, while she sedulously avoided me. Her countenance was of the most ashy paleness, and some sudden terror seemed to have possessed her; and when I anxiously demanded to know the cause of it, she wildly exclaimed—

"'Thee shall not see it—thee shall never see it—thee will break thy tender heart; and then old missus will break her heart too, when she hears of it.'

"'Hears of what?' uttered I, not once suspecting the nature of Lucilla's heartfelt grief; and at this precise moment my aunt entered the apartment. She was deeply agitated, but she endeavoured to appear tranquil, as she mildly addressed me (having first dismissed Lucilla from the room) in the following words:—

"'Be not alarmed, my dearest child; reflect on your situation, and pray be cautious; but I am inexpressibly grieved to tell you your husband has, without informing us of his intention, set out upon some little excursion, but will probably return shortly; do not flurry yourself about it.'

"Although my aunt evidently said this to prepare me for the shock I had to sustain, yet all was ineffectually the whole truth flashed upon my tortured mind at once, and, with a piercing and agonized shriek, I sunk insensible of all around me; and continued raving incessantly of Robert's cruelty, till in a moment of unutterable agony my deserted innocent first beheld the light; but I was not permitted to behold her till after many weeks of bodily and mental anguish had elapsed, and then it was only at intervals, when I was suffi-

ciently composed, that they suffered me to behold her.

"At length I arose as one from the precincts of the dark and mouldering tomb, dug by that hand I loved best, and with no distant traces, I thank Heaven, of that fatal beauty which I considered to have immediately been the whole source of my misfortunes. My complexion had changed its once delicate texture; my eyes had sunk deep in their sockets, and were no longer brilliant, or beaming with expression; my teeth had lost their pearly whiteness, and my lips their coral hue; while the profusion of auburn hair, which was once my pride and ornament, had been cut off during my fits of insanity; and my once round polished limbs were weak, emaciated, and resembled dry parchment stretched on bare bones. Yet it was necessary that I should exert fortitude for the sake of my helpless deserted infant, and the kind affectionate relative who had suffered so much anxiety for my sake. My child was baptized by the name of Amelia, in compliment to my aunt; but there were times, when I had not the courage to examine each sweet and lovely lineament, fearful that I should discover in her a likeness of her inhuman father; whose barbarous and unprincipled conduct, though I had taught myself to forgive, yet I could not so patiently forget; the deep injuries I had sustained inflicting on my heart a sharper pang, when I reflected how little I had merited such cruelty from his hands! To complain, however, was useless and unavailing, as no mortal living could redress my wrongs; while my kind aunt laboured incessantly to procure for my tortured mind peace and consolation;

and as frequently as we conversed on the past, she insensibly drew me to anticipate more pleasing hopes in contemplating the future; and that future was concentrated, in my hopes of happiness, when, no longer a wretched sojourner in this transitory existence, I should taste of immortal joys, uninterrupted by mortal cares. And I talked even calmly of such arrangements as I intended to make in my affairs at Fitzallan House, in case that I should be compelled, through necessity, to leave it; for what had I now to do with so elegant an establishment, while my infant was yet so young, and unable to share it with me? and where was the property which could support the expences that my base destroyer had already incurred? I could not deprive my poor aunt of the little patrimony she possessed, and had so long enjoyed, to supply my necessities, or those of my infant. This thought I could not support with any degree of toleration, and I therefore determined to retrench those expences as speedily as possible.

"Lucilla had been the nurse of my little Amelia. I had attempted to take upon me the tender duties of a mother, but the emaciated state to which my health was reduced by my long suffering had so materially injured my constitution, that I found the task to be impracticable; and the sight of the deserted innocent often threw me into the most alarming relapses of indisposition; in consequence of which it was thought necessary that I should have the charge of her as little as possible: and, in order to change the gloom which constantly interrupted every moment of repose beneath the roof in which I had passed so many fleeting

hours of bliss with my once adored Robert, where every object but reminded me of his apostate faith, and that I was indeed a deserted wife and mother, I retired for a short time to our beloved cottage, where, for whole days, I was debarred the sight of my little Amelia, because I could not endure to gaze on her innocent face, and think that her father had abandoned me.

"While in this silent and sequestered retreat, I paused on the holy page of Scripture, and there found the only solace the wretched find, in seeking redress from human injuries and human misery. I knew no other joy, no other bliss, than in retracing the happy hours, the roseate days of careless infancy, when, young and innocent, I wandered on the wild brown heath; or loitered in the humble shade, to cull the new-born flowers; or listened to the blackbird's song of tuneful melody. 'And are these delights I never more must share?' repeated I, as I reflected on the days I had passed in the cottage, with my dear indulgent aunt, in peace and innocence; and, in the words of my favourite poet, as I contemplated the village church, which modestly arose above the clump of trees by which it was surrounded, I exclaimed—

"When in these wilds a jocund sporting child,
Each flower self-sown my heedless hours beguiled,
The wabret leaf, that by the pathway grew,
The wild brier rose, of pale and blushful hue;
Again I view each rude romantic glade,
Where once my careless steps of childhood strayed.
Sweet scenes farewell, with all that most endears
The cloudless morning of my tender years;
With fond regret your haunts I wander o'er,
And wandering feel myself the child no more;

Your forms, your sunny tints are still the same,
But sad the tear which lost affection's claim."

"But on these pleasing, yet sometimes mournful retrospections of past scenes, I was not long permitted to dwell; for my little Amelia had caught the measles, and, with a mother's fond anxiety, I returned again to Fitzallan House, to share in the fatigue of watching her with her faithful nurse, poor old Lucilla. Ah then what tumults filled my anxious throbbing breast! for till then I did not know how dear a sick child was to a mother's heart. 'Perhaps it is also destined that I shall lose my smiling innocent,' uttered I, while tears chased each other down the cheeks of the watchful Lucilla: 'be it so; the will of Heaven be done, and to that also I must be resigned.' But in four days from this day, she recovered; and my transports and gratitude to Almighty Providence, for having preserved my soul's earthly treasure, were beyond the power of expression.

"'Cease to weep, my Catherine,' cried my aunt, 'for your little darling is restored to you.'

"'Then Heaven has heard a mother's prayer,' exclaimed I; and Lucilla, approaching with the infant, placed it in my arms. I gazed upon her with transports unutterable; I snatched her to my panting bosom with tenfold rapture, and felt considerably relieved by yielding to sensations I had neither power nor inclination wholly to suppress."—

CHAPTER XXI.

"Think not I love him, though I ask for him;
He's but a peevish man: yet he talks well;
But what care I for words? Yet words do well,
When he that speaks them pleases those that hear.
But sure he's proud; and yet his pride becomes him:
He'll make a proper man; the best thing in him
Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue
Did make offence, his eye did heal it up."

SHAKSPEARE.

"TILL then no tear had bedewed my burning cheek; but the uncommon beauty of my lovely infant suddenly bursting on my sight, occasioned a deluge of tears, and I sobbed on the innocent face which now in perfect sweetness resembled the fascinating smile of her father. 'Take her away, Lucilla,' cried I; 'she has blue eyes, and they will make my heart ache every time I look upon her.' Lucilla was so proud of her, that I put her in a rage; and, to say the truth, this faithful creature had nearly preserved her existence during the time of my illness, by the most unremitting care and attention.

"It was a length of time before I was permitted to see the cruel letter which Robert left on his dressing-table a few moments previous to his departure, and which Lucilla had nearly torn to atoms when she thrust it into her bosom. Had it been couched in affectionate terms, it might have produced some sentiments of rekindling tenderness; but it was so devoid of delicacy, good sense, or feeling, that I silently returned it to my aunt, shocked at the depravity of so young and so practised a deceiver. It contained the following consoling assurances of his regard:—

"'My dear Catherine,

"'When the bantling is born, perhaps I may return; but till then, you must positively excuse my withdrawing myself, as I really cannot endure a sick chamber, especially when it is inhabited by a cross old maid: besides, I am going to see dad, or there will be no touching of the chink for a long time; so I thought it best, my pretty Catherine, to spare you the trouble of parting. You are such a little fool, that I know you would never have consented to a formal separation, if I told you; therefore, my dear girl, I have stolen a march upon you. When the bantling comes, I suppose you will want money, as they are very expensive articles, and aunty won't be very willing to draw her purse strings. In my writing desk you will find notes to the amount of one hundred pounds. Adieu, child; and remember, I shall be excessively out of humour if this bantling does not prove a chopping boy. Give my love to aunty, and

tell her to take particular care of her pretty spoiled child.

Your affectionate Hubby,

Robert Melville.'

"This hundred pounds my aunt had carefully preserved for me; but as nearly a twelvemonth had elapsed since my husband's cruel desertion of me, I was at a loss what to do with Fitzallan House; for though my aunt would kindly have supplied me with the little all that she was possessed of to contribute in any degree to my comfort, yet I had no inclination to live in splendid poverty; and as she had made over her little cottage, with all its effects, to me, she immediately sent for the man of whom Fitzallan House had been rented, and paying off all arrears out of her own private purse, as well as discharging all other incumbrances upon us, we again became inmates of our cottage, hiring only one additional servant, to lessen the fatigue of Lucilla in her attendance upon my child.

"I should now have considered myself comparatively happy, my dear friends, had not a new source of affliction presented itself in the increasing indisposition of my dear aunt. I perceived her to be hourly declining; and after nearly three long years of suffering, during which she evinced the most exemplary fortitude, bequeathing to me every thing she possessed, she calmly and cheerfully resigned her pure and upright soul into the hands of its gracious and most adorable Maker. The irreparable loss I sustained in the death of my aunt was now added to all my other

griefs; and I wept incessantly, when I recollected, in every instance, her strong affection for me, which, though I had so greatly erred, she had testified to the latest moment of her existence. A melancholy now subdued every faculty of my soul, and I should have sunk into a state of inanity, had not the precious charge of my sweet promising child been dependant on me. A momentous task was assigned to me in the formation of her youthful mind, now dawning with every sweet impression of infantine grace. 'Oh my child!' ejaculated I; 'my poor deserted child! should thy mother sleep unmindful of her sacred trust, will she not be ten times more remorseless than thy unnatural father?' Roused thus to energy, the cure alone of hopeless grief, I snatched my cherub to my aching breast, resolved thus early in her youth to shut her ears against the pernicious counsels of her own sex, and to steel her heart against the fascinating allurements of the other. When she had attained her tenth year, I selected books from my aunt's well-chosen library, particularly adapted for my purpose; then, like a miser anxious but for his gold, and more watchful than the dragon which guarded the Hesperian fruit, I became the rigid monitress of my gentle Amelia, so called in compliment to my endeared and venerable aunt: but I found her so tenderly devoted to her unhappy mother, so eager to follow my precepts, and to imbibe my own sentiments, that I had no necessity to impose a command where my child thought it a duty to perform.

"As she grew towards womanhood, she lost much of that resemblance which, when an infant, she has

borne to her father, and, excepting his blue eyes and light hair, I beheld my Amelia the counterpart of her unfortunate mother: but the extreme emotion which she betrayed very early, at the death of her old nurse Lucilla, who survived my aunt only six months, gave me every reason to suppose that she would also possess that fatal gift, sensibility, which had been interwoven with my whole existence.

"I continued uninterrupted in our cottage till Amelia had completed her fifteenth year. She was all that a fond mother's heart could wish or hope for; and if my thoughts ever wandered for a moment on her cruel father, it was about the dreadful uncertainty of his fate. I imagined, my friends, he could not refuse to acknowledge the claims of his lovely child, if she were once presented to him. But how present her? Whither could I wander in search of him? A thousand vague schemes entered my imagination, which distracted and perplexed my anxious and disturbed mind. These, together with the rapid approaches of a decline, which had for some time threatened my constitution, fixed my determination of writing immediately to Ireland. Warrington Castle had for many years been purchased by a new owner, who could give me no intelligence either of the Earl or of his family, and I concluded that he must be no longer living; yet I ventured to address a letter to him as if he were, on the subject of my situation, both with respect to my state of health, and my circumstances, imploring his protection for my child, and informing him that my malady, which was hourly increasing, would not permit me to hope that I could survive long in this world of care.

I forbore to cast any reproaches on her unnatural father, and awaited with much impatience for the return of an answer. At the expiration of about three weeks, I was horror-struck by the following reply, with an inclosed donation of twenty pounds, from the Earl of Wartington, the superscription being thus contemptuously worded:—

"'*To the person who calls herself Mrs. Melville.*

"'Madam,

"'I am sorry for your distresses, but am really altogether surprised that you should impose yourself upon me as the wife of my son, who, I am well assured, never had any. Most unhappily for him, he was on the point of marriage with an accomplished lady of rank and fortune in this country, when an unfortunate dispute with a brother officer terminated his life in a duel.

"'Had my son ever formed an engagement of the nature you mention, he would either have communicated the intelligence to me himself, or I must necessarily have heard of it before this time, your daughter being, as you say, fifteen years of age.

"'You will excuse me, madam, in positively declaring that I cannot receive any spurious offspring of yours as the legitimate child of Robert Melville, nor can I readily pardon so gross an imposition upon my understanding. Begging, therefore, that you will not further molest me,

I remain,

Warrington, &c.'

"My wounded feelings were so cruelly tortured by this letter, that I fainted during the perusal of it. 'Oh heaven! just and merciful heaven!' thought I, 'are there no laws human or divine which can oblige the great to perform justice? Must then insulted virtue bow with humility to their superior wealth, and pay homage to their vices? My Amelia, clothed in spotless virtue, and adorned with honest principles, is above her hated grandsire; and to beg at his door would be beneath her,—I spurn the ignoble thought! detested be such wealth! perish such earthly grandeur!

"Shocked as I felt by the intelligence that my once loved Robert no longer existed, my heart thrilled with horror at his base inconstancy, perfidy, and cruelty. Yet amidst these conflicting sensations, I knew not how it was that a triumphant feeling suddenly took possession of my soul; and that he had not completed his base intention of wedding another object besides myself in this world, stifled for a moment all other agonizing and heart-rending recollections. I felt that I still so fondly idolized him, that had I heard of his approaching nuptials, it would have been instant annihilation. 'Peace to thy ashes, Robert,' cried I; 'for we shall meet again;—yes, I have a presentiment that we shall soon, very soon, meet again.' Amelia kneeling at my feet, where she continued supporting my languid head on her bosom, and bathing my temples with the tenderest assiduity, was the first object that roused me from this dreadful torpor into which I had fallen.

"'My child!' cried I.

"'Oh mother,' repeated she, 'what dreadful cala-

mity has befallen thee? Speak; let your Amelia share your griefs,—your Amelia, who would beg, starve, or perish, to give you peace. Oh, wherefore am I doomed for ever to see you weep?'

"'"'Tis for thee, my child,' replied I, 'for thee that my tears flow; I have now no earthly tie but you.'

"I then informed her of her father's death, repressing all that my indignant feelings taught me to do, to spare the delicacy of my spotless child. I did not dare to tell her then that her grandfather had refused her claim to his protection, (but she has since known it,) but giving her to understand that in future we must drop all further communication with her father's family, who had insulted me, enjoined her to silence ever after on the subject, an injunction she never disobeyed: in short, I never had encouraged Amelia to speak of her father, to whom indeed she owed but little obligation. She was sensible that he was the author of all my unhappiness; and she had heard old Lucilla, her nurse, very liberal in her abuse of him; yet this dutiful child, ever cautious of wounding my feelings, never once importuned me with questions concerning the author of her being, but bore in silence her mother's sufferings, mitigating by every sweet attention in her power, the burthen I was doomed to bear. Sickness sometimes overpowering me, she confined herself for whole weeks in my chamber, watching, praying, and administering her soothing powers to comfort me. In these moments, when I had thought death fast approaching, I have warned my beloved girl of the dangers which surrounded her, and taught her to look with independence on herself, to adore

with confidence the supreme Being, and to submit with fortitude to all the changes of her fate.

"My constant relapses of indisposition were indeed a heavy charge upon our small finances; and no longer able to keep Rebecca, (our only domestic since the death of poor old Lucilla,) I determined to part with her, and to break it to her as tenderly as possible, as she was a faithful creature. Alas! could I have looked into futurity, I should have known that Rebecca would not long have been a burthen on me. But my cup of sorrow was not yet brimful; for I was awakened somewhat towards the morning of a most tempestuous night, by the dreadful screams of this unhappy girl, who had accidentally left a candle not quite extinguished near a parcel of chips with which she lighted her fire. They became almost instantaneously in a blaze, and were communicating themselves to a part of the staircase, where Rebecca, in frantic terror, called on me to save her from the consuming fire. I had no neighbours near enough to render any timely assistance in the moment of dreadful calamity; and the flames approached so rapidly, that I had only time to remind my sleeping Amelia of her danger, while with loud and piercing shrieks I besought her to rush from the chamber and save herself.

"'What, and leave you, mother, here alone?' uttered the undaunted child; 'no—may I perish, if with the life of my mother I am to be saved!'

"And though death seemed inevitable, Amelia would not move without me. Catching at a part of the bed clothes, and wrapping them round me, she carried, or rather dragged me to the bottom of the staircase, when

our danger being perceived, several humane persons rushed in; alas! too late to save the life of Rebecca. Unhappy creature! she perished in the flames which her own carelessness had occasioned; yet I would have given millions to have preserved her existence.

"By this shocking catastrophe, I was bereft of every thing I possessed in the world; for the little stock of money I had in a small drawer in my apartment, was, with every individual article of wearing apparel, completely destroyed. What had I now to do with a wretched world? My beloved cottage was consumed to ashes, every sacred and precious relic that I loved destroyed, and myself totally incapable, by reason of my ill health, to gain a future subsistence by the labour of my hands. A pitying neighbour gave us, for a few days, an asylum in her cottage; and my Amelia, working at her needle, in a little time procured us decent apparel; more I looked not for, nor needed, for I had done with the world, and my heart was dead to all its enjoyments: but still, as a mother, I panted for my child, and thought I must soon leave her to all the miseries of a wretched world. The thought increased my disorder, and I became so nervous, that hysteric faintings seized me every hour in the day. My child, my good and amiable affectionate child, never quitted me. Her constant attendance prevented her from working, and we were often in want of the necessaries of life. My neighbour pitied me, but she was poor, and could not relieve me; already had she afforded me a bed in her house, by taking her three children to sleep with her, though one of them was ill of the measles.

"I could bear it no longer, my beloved friends; and I was determined that this compassionate creature should no longer suffer for her humanity. 'No,' cried I to my Amelia, as she watched by my bed side, 'no, to-morrow we will quit this roof for some solitary garret of our own; and there should my feeble spark of life be totally extinguished, and my Amelia become an orphan, may the unerring hand of Providence conduct the footsteps of humanity towards her, and may no pang be inflicted to wound her spotless heart; but let them remember that an orphan merits a double claim to their protection, and that though fatherless, and even motherless, she is still the peculiar care of that Father who is in heaven.'

"And was she not so, my dear Mrs. Evelyn?" continued Mrs. Melville; "did she not find protection, as well as myself, in the care and compassionate goodness of your worthy husband?. and have I not since found all that I could expect or hope for in friends, far, very far above my merits or expectations? For no sooner did I apply for parish relief for myself and my child, with a slight statement of my situation, than the excellent pastor paid me a visit of condolence, of friendship; and how quickly did he impart relief to my necessities, as well as soothed the anguish of my then great bodily affliction. It was your worthy husband, my dear Mrs. Evelyn, that did all this, even before I had an opportunity of beholding his angelic wife. What since I have experienced from his kindness, you well know; for soon after he removed me to this cottage, I was again stretched on the bed of sickness, and, as I thought, on the bed of death. But oh, Heaven

has been merciful, and heard my prayer that I have breathed night and morning, that I might be sufficiently collected to impart my sad, sad history to those kind and compassionate beings who have so strongly interested themselves in my misfortunes. The painful task I have lived to accomplish: how long I shall yet live to be a burthen on your bounty, Heaven alone can tell; but it will not be long,—I feel that it will not be long. But oh, my child! she will be protected. Oh, what transports does it afford, even in the anguished moments of eternal separation, to know that she will be protected by such kind souls, and that when I am no more, my Amelia will be in the hands of such benevolent friends!"

"Cease, dear Mrs. Melville, cease to dwell on such melancholy retrospections. Your death and separation from your child, are, I hope, far distant," cried Mrs. Evelyn, greatly affected by the narrative of this injured amiable sufferer; "but if not distant, fear not for the safety, the protection of your daughter."

"Ah, who would not protect, who would not be a friend to her?" cried Flora, who had been so deeply affected in the course of Mrs. Melville's narrative, as frequently to shed tears of the deepest sympathy. And never had Flora looked so beautifully, or shone so sweetly in her own native character, as, springing from the seat which she had occupied by the side of Mrs. Evelyn during the whole of Mrs. Melville's narrative, she grasped the hand of the languid sufferer, and bearing the tearful young Amelia to her side, she joined the hands both of the mother and her child, while she

exclaimed, with the most energetic warmth and feeling—

"Mrs. Evelyn and Fanny draw near, and be witness to what I here pronounce, to console the languishing hours of this dear unhappy, yet exemplary victim of man's perfidious ingratitude to the best and loveliest of our sex, whose fond affections have been so unworthily requited. Here, in the face of Heaven, and of you, my beloved friends, I pledge my faith to become the protectress of this deserted lovely girl—to take her beneath my roof, when she shall want a roof to shelter her—and to be unto her a faithful, undeviating, unchanging friend? So hear me, Heaven! may it abandon me, whenever I abandon her! For you, Mrs. Melville, all that can be done for the restoration of your health, or the comfort and convenience of the happiness of yourself and daughter, shall be speedily procured; there is not a wish of yours which shall not, if it lies in the means of human possibility, be granted. Be but comforted, and be but composed. I am a widow, you know, Mrs. Melville, and my dear departed lord has left me a rich one; young and foolish, perhaps, but not without discretion, I hope, to prevent me from the commission of unworthy actions; and with heart and spirit enough to feel warmly for the sufferings of humanity. I have no children, and no tie living, save a dear old worthy uncle, and queer old maiden aunt, who do not need my assistance; they have plenty: but I have acthally more than I know what to do with; so it is all the better for my friends, you know, my dear Mrs. Melville. Get well as soon

as you can, if you please, my dear madam; and expect to see Doctor Maitland to-morrow morning; I shall send him to you, and send the carriage also, for you and my daughter Amelia to come and pay a visit to me at the Priory."

So rapid had been the speech of Flora, that when she arose to depart, neither the deeply agitated mother, nor the greatly astonished, though transported daughter, had the power of making any reply. In the meanwhile Flora had contrived to slip into Amelia's hand all the money that Fanny Evelyn had, by her desire, brought out with her, making her an expressive sign that she wished nothing to be said about it; but when the words, "My daughter Amelia," were uttered in a voice of such fascinating sweetness, the poor girl, wholly overpowered by such a noble display of unaffected benevolence, burst into tears, and could scarcely pronounce the necessary adieu to her lovely benefactress; while Mrs. Melville was deprived of the power of utterance altogether: and although Mrs. Evelyn, at the departure of her sweet friend, entreated her to be composed, and that she would see her shortly, yet she was not composed for many hours succeeding to this affecting communication with her esteemed friends. It is true, that she now wanted nothing, either for herself or her beloved child, and she had been assured that she should never want again while she remained a sojourner in this earthly state of existence: but the tide of joy which rushed over her heart, and the sudden change in her prospects from the lowest depths of despair to scenes so unexpected and so flattering for the future happiness of her child, were too powerful for

her weak and already exhausted form to bear; and when, by order of Lady Primrose, she was visited the ensuing morning by a medical attendant, he found her most alarmingly under the influence of those symptoms which had so recently attacked her nervous system. Every relief, however, that could be afforded by so able and experienced a practitioner, was immediately administered. But on the return of Dr. Maitland to the Priory, he was obliged candidly to express his opinion of Mrs. Melville's case; that her constitution was already a decayed one, and that she was rapidly approaching to the last stage of human suffering, which it was not in the power of medicine to avert: yet it was probable that her sufferings would not be severe, though tedious and lingering.

Flora heard this decision with a sympathizing sigh, having in the mean time informed her uncle of all she had learnt of the history of the unfortunate Mrs. Melville, and her intention of becoming the protectress of her daughter whenever death should deprive her of a mother's care; which not only met the approbation and consent of the equally humane and generous Sir Hector, but he very warmly applauded his lovely niece for her charitable intentions, well knowing that she could put all this into practice without any particular incumbrance on herself or personal property. He himself, though not half so rich as Flora, had provided for Llewelyn and his family: he had pledged his word to become responsible for his rent while he tenanted the cottage that belonged to Sir Jasper Wilding. And if Flora had promised to protect a poor fatherless girl, whose mother then lay at the point of death, what

right had he to discourage her in such amiable propensities. Flora was rich enough to protect twenty orphans, if she pleased; and gazing at her love-beaming countenance with the most ineffable delight, as she simply told the tale of Mrs. Melville's sufferings and sorrows, he rapturously exclaimed—

"Gad zookers, my Flora, I do verily believe that you came to the earth in a sun-beam, and that the roseate morn shed all its blooming sweets upon every flower that opened its leaves on your natal day. You smiling happy rogue you, there was no night work with you, you gipsey, unless it was a clear cloudless sky, when, as the poet says,

'The moon was up, and yet it was not night;
Sunset divides the sky with her: heaven was free
From clouds; but of all colours seemed to be,
Save that which knew no frowning hue.'

So having determined first on taking this poor girl into your family, Mistress Flora, you come and ask my advice afterwards."

"Yes, uncle; but I thought you would not object to my having made such a determination," cried Flora, and smiled.

"No; I should be a pretty sort of a scamndrel, if I did any such thing," resumed Sir Hector. "Do as your heart directs you, my darling, and let the world jog on its own way, as long as you pursue yours. For my part, I do not see what the world has to do with you, since you are so completely independent of its frowns."

"And its smiles I do not value," cried Flora, with a half repressed sigh.

"Well, what have you to say to your aunt Lydia, Flora?" said Sir Hector; "for to-morrow I propose setting out for Oldstock Hall. I have arranged all my business with the Evelyns about Llewelyn; it is all clearly understood that Sir Jasper is not to expect to receive his rent from that quarter; I have eased the poor man's mind in that respect, and have left his lovely wife quite happy with the promise that I have made her, that my friendship will long be extended towards her and her worthy husband."

"I think you were born in a sunbeam as well as me, uncle," cried Flora, laughing.

"Well, I don't know but I was," cried Sir Hector, "I don't know but I was, you gipsey. I love the solar beam better than I do the frigid zone, believe me; genial warmth has an influence upon the spirits, and the constitution, and so forth; and I like to impart some portion of it to my fellow men, when they are in want of it. There is poor Llewelyn, for instance; I have made him the happiest dog in existence, and I have not made myself a miserable one; and by what? Only by parting with a little trifling dross, that the world thinks so much of, and I think so little; and I am more than recompensed, my Flora, by the comfortable sensation I feel within; I have made a deserving industrious man happy, a man of talent too, and he merits the reward; and I have made myself happy, by being able to make him so; I consider, therefore, that the obligation is mutual."

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who, presenting a letter to his lady, informed her that it had been brought to the

Priory by one of Lord Clairville's servants, who was not desired to wait for an answer, and had immediately departed.

"By one of Lord Clairville's servants?" cried Flora, blushing deeply on perceiving that the superscription was addressed to herself.

"Yes, my Lady," answered the servant, and bowing respectfully, retired.

"My gracious, uncle! what can his Lordship possibly mean by writing to me?" cried Flora, not once offering to break the seal, to see what it contained.

Sir Hector laughed at the perplexity of poor Flora.

"Why it possibly means, my love," uttered he, "what all men would possibly feel, were they placed in his Lordship's possible situation. He is in love, has no objection to a wife, and that letter contains an offer of his hand and fortune; I would wager a thousand pounds of it."

And so it was: it was actually what Sir Hector had predicted; a full disclosure of the most fervent passion, with a proposal of marriage from the Earl of Clairville, the terms of which were highly flattering and delicate, as well as liberal to the young and lovely widow; for the Earl declared himself wholly unbiassed by the smiles of fortune, rejecting to take any particle from thence, where nature had given so much; her lovely hand and person was all the boon he solicited. In short, Sir Hector having read the letter by Flora's desire, protested that he thought highly of the Earl, and considered his proposal one of the most honourable and liberal nature, concluding his eulogium on his merits, by declaring that, for his own part, he had

no objection to receiving his Lordship as a nephew, if Flora had no objection to receiving him as a husband.

"Me receive Lord Clairville as a husband, uncle?" cried Flora with astonishment, and blushing confusedly.

"Why yes, my love," replied Sir Hector; "for what else would you receive him?"

"Then he will certainly never be received by me in that character," resumed Flora, with decision and spirit; "for I will never marry any man whom I do not prefer to all others, before all the world: and I do not love Lord Clairville; I may respect, esteem, and even admire, but I am well assured that I shall never love him."

"And pray what do you intend saying in reply to his Lordship's proposal, Flora?" cried Sir Hector.

"I have only one reply, uncle; that I feel myself obliged for the good opinion with which he honours me, but that I have no inclination to alter my condition."

"But you do not intend always to remain a widow, Flora?" archly inquired Sir Hector.

"Yes—no—yes—I really cannot tell, uncle; perhaps I may, and perhaps I may not," answered the young widow, with the utmost visible embarrassment; and Sir Hector laughed immoderately.

"Yes—no—yes," mimicked he; "upon my soul, Flora, those are the most distinct monosyllables I ever heard pronounced in my born days, and mighty satisfactory too, on the present occasion."

"Dear uncle, how you delight in tormenting me," nttered Flora, in a more pettish tone than was at all

mental with her; "what pleasure can you take in teasing me; and why should you be surprised at my rejecting the addresses of Lord Clairville?"

"You widely mistake, my dear Flora," cried Sir Hector, more gravely; "I am under no such surprise whatever; I should not be surprised at your rejecting the addresses of any man living—save one alone—and he, it appears, is the very last personage likely to offer them."

Flora was scarce proof against this reiterated force of her uncle's raillery, and tears were actually starting in her eyes. She felt too conscious to what personage his allusion pointed at, and a short interval of painful silence ensued. At length, after a struggled sigh, she exclaimed—

"And is it really your intention to leave the Priory to-morrow, my dear uncle?"

"Why yes, I think I have staid long enough," uttered Sir Hector, in a half offended tone, "since I have staid sufficiently long to put your Ladyship out of temper."

Flora reddened up like scarlet; yet smiling with the most winning softness, at the same moment extending her snowy little hand to her uncle, which immediately received the warm pressure of his, she exclaimed—

"But you have not put her Ladyship out of temper, and you cannot put her Ladyship out of temper, try which way you will, Sir Hector Oldstock."

"Well, I don't believe he can, and that is the truth of it; and now you may marry or not marry, just as you please, my darling, and I will never say a word more on the subject."

"But you won't go to-morrow, uncle? any day but to-morrow. Do you know where we are invited to-morrow, Henry and all of us?"

"Oh true, I remember something of an engagement being made with that charming old lady, the Duchess of Pemberton, at her family mansion, called by that singular title, the Round Tower, and so called by that no less singular young man, her nephew;—what's his name, Flora?"

Flora pretended to be looking at her watch when this interrogatory was made by Sir Hector, and some how or other forgot to answer him.

"Bless me, how time flies," uttered Flora.

"Yes, it is the only thing that does not flatter us; and that grim looking gentleman, Mr. Death; they are neither of them very deceptive characters. So you would have me stay and go with you to the Round Tower, Flora?"

"Certainly, uncle; you accepted of the Duchess's invitation, and you cannot now retract from it."

"Well then, I will postpone my journey till another day, Flora, on purpose to please you," cried Sir Hector.

Flora smiled; and, as usual, her smile was fascination.

"I shall meet you at dinner, nunkey," cried Flora; and they parted, only to meet again with returning good humour.

CHAPTER XXII.

"She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought;
And with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat, like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief!"

SHAKSPEARE.

FLORA had parted with her uncle, as she had told him, to attend to her toilet; but far other occupations had engaged her mind than merely to attend to the decoration of her person, which in fact claimed but little of her attention—which, beautiful, wanted no art to set it off. And Flora had no vanity; or if she had, it was not personal vanity: her only wish, her only thought, was to create universal good, and to dispense blessings around her. But Flora, on her arrival at her dressing-room, was puzzled to know what she should do with the letter of the Earl of Clairville, which, according to the common rules of good breeding, required an immediate answer to the generous and flattering proposals he had made to her, to say nothing of

the high opinion she already entertained of his Lordship's character and principles; which, it is probable, would have met with no dissenting voice from the lovely widow, had her heart felt no predilection in favour of another. Lord Clairville was a man whom every delicate female, consulting taste and judgment, might approve; and Flora would probably have given her hand to him, without doing much violence to her inclinations, had her heart whispered that it was entirely free: but love, in the words of the old song, would not be cheated; and the image of the Marquis of Rosalvie prevented the possibility of her ever feeling a predilection in favour of any one human being besides: and even though hopeless was the passion that she had conceived for this unfortunate, yet most fascinating young nobleman, yet she felt well assured that this prepossession she should never feel again; and whatever favourable sentiments she might cherish for Lord Clairville, the wish to become his wife was not among the catalogue of her present sensations. With this conviction weighing on her mind, Flora sat down hastily to compose a billet to the enamoured Lord, couched, however, with the utmost delicacy and feeling. It was expressed in the following words:—

"My Lord,

"I was honoured with yours this morning; and a sense of propriety, as well as delicacy, induces me not to keep you a moment in suspense respecting the nature of its contents. I must be insensate indeed, my Lord, were I blind to your extraordinary merits, or the generous proposals which ac-

company your letter; and it is painful to me to wound your feelings, when I also add, that however noble your Lordship's offer, it is totally out of my power to accept of it. I have really no wish to form a second matrimonial connection, unless I could return an affection so ardent and sincere as that with which your Lordship so greatly honours me. I shall always gratefully acknowledge, and endeavour to prove worthy of your friendship, your esteem, my Lord; but the affections which influence the heart are not always under our own control, however highly we may appreciate the merits of the object whom we respect, esteem, admire, venerate, but cannot feel a warmer sentiment for.

"Under these circumstances, I conclude, with every good wish for your Lordship's happiness, health, prosperity, and all other blessings that can attend a life passed in the practice of such exemplary virtues as adorn and beautify your Lordship's character.

Your most gratefully obliged,
And sincere Friend and Servant,
Flora Primrose."

Notwithstanding the contents of this epistle were perused and re-perused at least twenty times over, yet Flora was not perfectly satisfied in her own mind that it was such as she ought to have dictated to a man of such exalted rank as Lord Clairville; and she coloured deeply when, on going down stairs, she placed it in the hands of her uncle, and demanded to know what he thought of it; and to which, after having hastily

glanced his eyes over the contents, Sir Hector very archly replied—

"Why, it is just such a letter as you ought to write to any man who tells you so honestly his mind, and makes you so liberal an offer of his hand and fortune; which, by the bye, you don't deserve, you little perverse gipsey you; and it's a very great pity that you won't have him after all."

"Dear uncle, how can you talk so absurdly ridiculous?" cried Flora, with a deep crimson blush mounting to her fair face and transparent bosom. "I never gave Lord Clairville any reason to imagine that he would ever be received by me in the light of an accepted lover, much less as a husband; he had no cause from me to cherish any such hope, and therefore cannot be disappointed. But is the letter I have written to his Lordship a proper one?"

"Oh yes, it will do well enough," uttered Sir Hector, now laughing at the embarrassment which poor Flora betrayed; "it is something like breaking a man's head, and then giving him a plaister to heal it up again,—bitter and sweet, as the saying is; but he must e'en gulp it down, and make the best of it, whether he likes it or not."

The entrance of Ensign Conway was a most fortunate relief to the embarrassed feelings of the lovely widow, who, without further ceremony, despatched her letter to the disappointed Earl, and sat down to dinner with her accustomed good humour and charming flow of spirits, which were not decreased by the engagement she had formed for the ensuing day to

dine at the dowager Duchess of Pemberton's, where she was certain of encountering an object which, however dangerous to her repose, she yet most anxiously and impatiently longed to behold again, the sentences he had pronounced at their last interview being a little enigmatical to Flora. In short, the whole conduct of the Marquis of Rosalvie had been, to make the best of it, strangely mysterious. He seemed interested in all she did or said; then had suddenly relapsed into forgetfulness of her situation: and yet, when animated, there was such energy in his speaking countenance, such intelligence conveyed in every word, such melodious softness in his voice, such grace in his manner, and such beauty in his form, that the Apollo of Belvidere might have vainly contended with him for symmetry of figure. In short, Flora loved him, and she could not help it, nor oppose the powerful influence he held over her heart. In vain had she struggled to conceal it in her youthful bosom, in vain had she tried to reason herself out of it. But reason and love are two powerful assailants; they are ever at war with each other, and cannot be reconciled. Although Wisdom stood over us as the watchful centinel, still the rosy boy with dimpled smiles mocks our vain attempts, and sends the sober goddess hence, spite of her utmost endeavours to prevent it. And the more Flora struggled to conceal her passion for the Marquis, the more it became perceptible to the eye of every beholder. At the slightest mention of his very name, she would redden or turn pale, just as occasion warranted; and when suddenly Henry Conway observed that he had seen some one crossing the meadow fields resembling

the Marquis of Rosalvie, Flora blushed most deeply; and more, when Henry casually observed that he had seen him help the maid Marian (a pretty lass just entered into the establishment of Lady Primrose) with her milking pails. The unsteady hand of the lovely widow, who was at this precise moment in the act of pouring out the tea, proved that this circumstance relative to Rosalvie, however trifling, had the power of disquieting her, and even alarming her jealousy; for she pettishly exclaimed, hardly knowing whether she had put cream or sugar into the cups—

"The Marquis of Rosalvie in the meadow fields helping Marian with her milking pails? A very likely thing indeed, Mr. Conway; you were surely dreaming when you imagined you beheld the Marquis of Rosalvie so employed."

"Well, and suppose he was?" cried Sir Hector, who had remarked her agitation, as well as the unusual petulance which marked her manner. "Gad zookers! I think it a very pretty employment to help a pretty maiden like Marian with her milking pails; and I dare say the Marquis thought so too: he is no Joseph, I warrant me, when a pretty woman happens to fall in his way. But zounds, Flora, you have given me no sugar, and Henry no cream; with his comical tale he has told of pretty Marian and the Marquis, we are like to have no breakfast.—Well, Hal, and so you really thought you saw this sly demure looking young gentleman with Marian in the meadow fields?"

To which Henry, unconscious of the pain he had inflicted on the heart of Flora, till he beheld her blushing countenance and embarrassed looks; and perceiv-

ng that his patron was actually enjoying the confusion of his lovely niece, now more cautiously replied—

"Sir, I cannot positively say it was the Marquis; I only at first imagined that it was something like him; but I may be under a mistake; perhaps some rustic swain, that accidentally encountered the pretty Marian, and so kindly offered his assistance."

Henry had now made bad worse. Flora blushed a deeper crimson, and Sir Hector laughed outright, while he jocosely vociferated—

"Gad zookers! that won't do, Hal; and it is no use your denying what appears to me to be a plain matter of fact; the maid Marian is a very pretty tempting lass, with nut-brown hair and black eyes, and rosy cheeks, just for all the world like wild roses on a hedge. Gad zookers! I have looked at the wench many times, and by the good faith of a soldier, should have had no objection to have afforded her the assistance that the Marquis did with her milking pails. Zounds, Flora! no sugar again in my second cup of tea. My love, this story of your maid Marian seems to have set all your tea equipage in confusion. But who would have thought that the Marquis had been so sly, hey, Flora? But it is always the way with your demure, sober, sentimental, grave looking, melancholy young gentlemen; I never knew one of them that, under the rose, did not turn out the arrantest rake in existence."

Not a word of reply did the now highly mortified Flora make to this unmerciful raillery of her facetious uncle; and although he had no intention of wounding the feelings of his lovely niece, yet he certainly did

enjoy the confusion she so perceptibly betrayed, feeling more convinced than ever that the Marquis of Rosalvie possessed a most powerful influence over her affections, and but that little doubt would remain of his being the *Widow's Choice*, had Flora been equally the object of his; but that she was not so, was a circumstance that Sir Hector Oldstock lamented most deeply, and hourly deplored an attachment so hopeless and unavailing, but which he feared was too deeply rooted ever to be eradicated. In short, he began to suspect that Flora would continue a widow to the end of her days, unless she could marry this said Marquis, of which at present there was not the slightest probability. There was an impenetrable mystery in both the character and affairs of the Marquis, which it was not possible for either Flora or himself to develope, and which greatly injured the honourable Lord in the opinion of the veteran soldier, who had an unconquerable and invincible dislike to all mysteries whatever, and who was himself too fair and open in all his proceedings to wear a mask in the presence of the objects that he loved. In short, Sir Hector found so many reasons repulsive to the wish of seeing the lovely widow the wife of the Marquis, that he resolved, as soon as he could settle his affairs at Oldstock Hall, to use his influence with his darling niece, to persuade her to accompany him on a tour to Florence, where he had long intended to go, to fulfil a sacred promise he had given to Henry Conway while on the continent, and which he, from motives of delicacy, had never once reminded him of: but now it occupied his most serious contemplations, and he determined to take the

earliest opportunity of speaking to Flora on the proposed plan; it was an admirable suggestion, he thought, to steal her away from the Priory for a few months, and prevent the possibility of her seeing the Marquis for a considerable length of time; and perhaps, if they frequented public places of resort, of fashionable amusement, she might meet with an object likely to rival him in her estimation, and this dangerous and fascinating man would be forgotten. This thought was so highly gratifying to Sir Hector, and he calculated so well upon the advantages, as well as on the success of his intended expedition, and the little stratagem he was going to adopt to secure the happiness and lay a foundation for the permanent felicity of his adored niece, that he had sat absorbed so completely in reflection, that Flora, astonished at his taciturnity, which was so unusual with him, and the mechanical manner in which he had several times taken out his snuff-box, at length smilingly exclaimed—

"My gracious, uncle! what can you be thinking of?"

To which, ro[illegible] and fixing his eye full [illegible] on her lovely face, he r[illegible]

"I am thinki[illegible] ploit as ever filled the h[illegible] ich if I could once achieve, I should be one of the happiest dogs in existence."

"And may I not know it?" uttered Flora, with a look and a smile which Sir Hector had some difficulty to withstand. Conceiving, however, that the whole of his design would be completely frustrated by an immediate disclosure to Flora, and that she would naturally

start some objection to accompanying him to Florence, he jocosely exclaimed—

"No, not yet,—gad zookers! not yet, my Flora, mustn't pop the secret out of the bag yet; I must manœuvre a little first, like an experienced commander, when he marches at the head of his regiment, first to the right, then to the left, then advance, then retreat, till I make my attack certain, and my victory secure."

The eyes of the old veteran sparkled with increased animation and triumph as he uttered this speech; and not only Flora, but even Henry felt some symptoms of curiosity to know what had so suddenly entered the imagination of Sir Hector, and which seemed actually to afford him the most exquisite delight. But to have made inquiries, that even the lovely widow did not think proper to hazard, fearful of displeasing him, would have been the height of indelicacy and impertinence in him to attempt; and therefore, for the present, the subject was suspended; as Flora evinced some impatience to r ing-room to arrange the important b t, which on that day was important e er serious attention. She wished to l es of one exclusive personage alone to be exclusively admired; and looking at her watch, she observed that the hour was growing late, and that if they continued chatting so long, they would have but little time to dress. To which observation Sir Hector, slyly winking at Henry, bluntly replied—

"Well, what does it matter whether we go late or early to meet such a humdrum party?"

"Humdrum party, uncle?" echoed Flora, colouring deeply; "you surely forget that the Countess of Stormond is one of the party, and that the charms of her Ladyship's conversation and elegant manners are a sufficient inducement, was there no other, for us to join them."

"Was there no other" had the effect of heightening the colour both on the cheek and the lip of Flora; the more, when Sir Hector pronounced, with equal emphasis—

"Yes! was there no other society but that of the charming Countess and her pretty daughters, it would be vastly agreeable, I own; but who the plague is to be bored the whole day with that of the melancholy Marquis also, with his sighs, and his ahs, and his ohs; when one is just in the middle of a pleasant story, to see his eyes suddenly turned up to look at the moon, and the stars, and the planets, and then entertain us with a long and elaborate discourse upon them, as if every one besides himself were profoundly ignorant of the nature of them. dicu-
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Poor Henry, who at any other time would have been almost convulsed with laughter at the whimsicality of his patron, now felt too much for the embarrassed looks of the lovely widow to utter a sentence that would at all increase the jocularity of Sir Hector, or add to the mortification which this amiable creature

was entering; had he stammered out, somewhat awkwardly indeed—

"Why really, sir, the moon, and the stars, and the planets, are subjects that the wisest would contemplate with pleasure, wonder, and delight; and to such an elegant and enlightened mind as that which the Marquis of Rosalvo seems to possess, they must awaken the highest energy, and inspire sensations that have not the same influence over the feelings of others; that is to say, the very enlightened mind of the Marquis—is—is"—

"Is—is—is—why, what the devil, Hal, are you croaking for, like a toad that has got a sore throat?" uttered Sir Hector, raising his voice in a somewhat higher key; "what do you mean by your is—is—and your enlightened, and all such bombastic stuff? The light of a fiddlestick's end, I say, for I don't believe that the fellow is a bit more enlightened than we who are compelled to hear his farrago of nonsense, and his far-fetched logic, and his school-boy's pedantry. For my own part, I like the light of the moon, and the stars; and I [illegible] formed them as much as any man [illegible] them in their proper places, and [illegible]

"And pr[illegible] a season more proper than another to adore the works of the omnipotent Being?" uttered Flora, with an involuntary warmth and spirit which she no longer had the power to suppress; "should we not adore and admire the works of his beneficent hand in all seasons, at all times, without having respect to personages, or circumstances, or

studying the caprices of others who do not feel so inclined? It is a great and universal privilege given to all ages, all ranks in society; and I much wonder that you, uncle, should be one of that number who do not admit of its propriety—of its morality."

Flora's appeal to the feelings of Sir Hector was now unanswerable; nor did she continue a moment longer in his presence, to hear whether he intended to make any. He had severely tried the sweet and amiable mildness of her temper, and perfectly exhausted her patience; and if ever she loved her uncle less, it was at this moment that he had so wantonly, and she thought, cruelly played upon her feelings; for Flora was well aware that all he had said was purposely to torment her, as nothing he had adduced could reasonably preponderate against the character of the noble Lord whom he had been attempting to render so ridiculous: but vain was that attempt with her; mistress of her own actions, as well as her own will and power, she determined to be guided by herself alone, and submit to no authority in the disposal of her heart, her hand, or her property, when that authority was extending beyond the bounds of reason or of justice. Flora was resolved to repulse it, let the ties be ever so dear, or ever so sacred. Her father had scarcely been so arbitrary as her uncle was now likely to be, merely in the supposition (for, alas! there did not appear any reality) that she was going to marry the Marquis of Rosalvie,—he who had never yet condescended even to solicit it; but if he had, if he did, (and the heart of Flora swelled with rapture at the thought,) she should not reject it merely because her uncle did not like the

object of her second choice. She felt, and proudly felt, that the Marquis of Rosalvie was worthy of her hand; and thinking so, she had no right to appeal to any one else for the approval of his merits. But Flora was the most sensitive, although one of the most mirthful beings in creation; and she could neither bear to wound the feelings of another, and was ill calculated to retaliate when her own were wounded and deeply hurt by the bitter sarcasm of those objects whom most she loved. Among this number was surely Sir Hector Oldstock; nor could she imagine why her uncle, so liberal and generous in his sentiments to all others, should be so prejudiced against the merits of the amiable Marquis of Rosalvie; and Flora feared, though she had long anticipated the pleasure and happiness she should experience on this day from her visit to the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, and in the elegant society of the amiable Countess of Stormond, and the sweet interesting Lady Emmeline, that the strange and sudden whimsicality of her uncle's manner might manifest itself in some shape or other repulsive and unpleasing to the party he was going to meet; and that he would be particularly so to the Marquis, and by that means she might eventually become more indifferent to him than ever, in the supposition that he was an object of dislike to her uncle. So mortifying a reflection neither tended to exhilarate the spirits of the lovely widow, or added to the roses of her complexion; and neither the presence of Rachel, or the beautiful dress which was laid out to the best advantage to adorn her lovely person, had the power of restraining her tears, as they fell over her

check, during the time that Rachel was employed in binding up her lovely luxuriant tresses, and offering some ornaments which she had selected for the occasion with no little degree of self consequence; for Mistress Rachel was on very excellent terms with herself; and her gentle and indulgent Lady had allowed her privileges, and granted her liberties, since Lord Primrose had died, that she well knew how to take an advantage of, and was feathering her nest pretty well in her service, without Flora ever once troubling her head about the affair. She had a young and lovely mistress, whose wants were easily satisfied; and whose equal sweetness of temper was seldom ruffled from its usual quiet and serene temperature. Rachel knew how to manage her; and while she was rendering herself the object of envy and dislike to the inferior domestics in the establishment of Lady Primrose, and wounding the feelings of those more worthy and firmly attached to the interests of their lovely Lady, Flora still continued to load her favourite and so greatly envied Abigail with an increase of her favours, not once suspecting that she was not fully worthy of her confidence, or that she was hourly breeding dissensions and quarrels with those who had more faithfully served the interests of their late beloved master. And the housekeeper, in her department, was precisely following the example of Rachel, with whom she was in high favour; that is, she always submitted in authority to Rachel, because she was aware of the influence that she possessed over the mind of her Lady; and the accommodating Abigail, in return for the compliment bestowed on her by the civil, obliging, and good-tem-

pared Mrs. Wilkins, suffered her to entertain her little private parties of five or six personages, to partake of a sumptuous supper, almost every night, without the knowledge of her Lady; wines too, of the most delicious quality, which had never seen daylight but on particular occasions in the lifetime of Lord Primrose, were now hauled from their most secret recesses, where his Lordship had so carefully deposited them, and spread before the little snug parties of Mrs. Wilkins, when she chose to invite a select number of her particular friends to meet at a gala feast within the plenteous and hospitable gates of Stanmore Priory; and many nights, when the lovely mistress of this magnificent mansion had retired to bed, after having only partaken of a morsel of bread and cheese, or a little fruit with bread and butter, Mrs. Wilkins and her friend Rachel were dressed up in their best bibs and tuckers to receive a party of private friends, whom they had invited to a family supper at Stanmore Priory; and had Lady Primrose herself been present, there could not have been more mock ceremony used, and more ridiculous pageantry and affectation displayed than by this lady's maid and lady's housekeeper, who, arrogating to themselves the consequence of their illustrious Lady, domineered over the rest of the inferior domestics; and they, afraid of losing their situations, suffered in silence the wrongs they sustained, not doubting but one day or other the perfidious conduct of these two artful jades would reach the ear of their lovely Lady, and that they would then be sufficiently punished for their infidelity and ingratitude towards her. It is true that they could have made this

known long before; but some of them, although they murmured, were afraid to speak, and sometimes receiving little bribes and presents to hold their tongues at particular seasons, the poor rogues had no other alternative but to grin and bear it; Rachel possessing such unbounded influence over the mind of her lovely mistress, that they were fearful that she would make her story good in spite of all their assaverations of the impropriety of her proceedings, and in consequence, get them discharged; and the establishment of the lovely widow was superior to any around the neighbouring country; there were none so wealthy, or whose board was so sumptuous, and little work to do in the bargain; so that to have complained of Rachel or the housekeeper, her particular friend, they knew would be unavailing; unless they were actually about to leave the service of their lovely mistress, they could not do this with impunity, and it was too good a place to abandon without mature consideration, and the reflection that they might never chance to get such another.

Thus were the nefarious practices and indecent conduct of the lady's maid and housekeeper for awhile concealed from the knowledge of Lady Primrose; but the unexpected arrival of Sir Hector Oldstock, Ensign Conway, and the black servant Juba, served for a continued length of time as a drawback and check to their nocturnal visitors and their nightly revels. Rachel had just seen sufficient of Sir Hector to be on her guard, and to apprise her obliging civil friend Mrs. Wilkins that they must be a little circumspect in their conduct during the time that the veteran soldier re-

retained the guest of his lovely niece, from whose society they most fervently prayed that he might soon withdraw himself. And though Rachel used every art in her power to make herself a favourite with Juba, for some unaccountable reason or other, Juba neither liked Rachel, nor had any particular fondness for Mrs. Wilkins; for the first night of his arrival at the Priory she had, as usual, a snug little party to supper, and Juba was turned very unceremoniously into another room, where he was both cold and hungry, to wait till they had finished their supper; and when at last permitted to appear amongst them, he became the quiz of the whole company, owing probably to the keenness of his appetite, which made him devour greedily every thing that was set before him, without much regard to the finely dressed personages who surrounded him; and having helped himself pretty plentifully of the delicate dishes which were in his reach, and somewhat appeased the cravings of his empty stomach, he gazed on the motley group, who were staring at him as if he had been a wild beast just imported from Exeter 'Change, he exclaimed, in his negro accent—

"You no eatee no drinkee all day long, you eatee drinkee too. Why for you give him big eye, and grin, show you teeth, see poor black boy eatee drinkee, when him hungry, dry, wait him supper?"

This speech convulsed the whole of the gay and jovial party with shouts of the most involuntary laughter; and the curious perturbed Mistress Rachel, exchanging some sly and malicious glances with her obliging civil friend Mrs. Wilkins, with an air of the most provoking irony, demanded to know of Juba if it

was positively true, what he had stated, that he had neither eaten, nor drank the whole day long. To which John coolly replied—

"What for you tink me no tell you true?"

"What for?" uttered Rachel, tossing her head contemptuously; "because I am sure it is no such thing, that's why, Mr. Sancelot. A pretty likely story, indeed, that your master would keep you starving all day for victuals to eat, when he himself stopped at every inn on the road to take refreshment. But that is the way with you blacks in your hottentot country; you are so used to tear raw flesh to pieces, and such like, that you don't know when you get enough of food that is nice and comfortable, and fit for a Christian. Lauk-a-mercy, I wonder when you are so sharp set that you don't fall to and eat one another."

Another loud laugh from the ladies and gentlemen proved the test of Mrs. Rachel's witticism; but it produced a very contrary effect on the enraged features of the black, who vociferated, more loudly than politely, and while he scowled most indignantly on the little pert waiting gentlewoman—

"My country good country; no cute bad ting no more den yours; and white man come dere, he get good, good tings—smack him lip, make heart merry: den he get rich, and get proud, and go back again to him own country, tell lies of poor black man, say him eatee raw flesh, and give him bad name, when he no deserve it; when him poor, he no speak bad word to black man; black man stoop buckle him shoe,—white man say tankey; get money from sugar cane, he go back again, no tankey at all."

To have resisted laughter at the conclusion of this speech, which, however, preponderated greatly against the attack of Mistress Rachel on the honest unsophisticated son of nature, would have been morally impossible; and one of this facetious, mirthful party, valet of Lord Jessamy, a monkey who had seen the world and who valued himself on the superior advantages he had gained by travelling behind his master's carriage, and taking small change from the waiters at inns; and who, on account of his various accomplishments and a tolerable good stock of assurance, had pushed his nose into the agreeable society of the chatty Mrs. Wilkins, and the pretty Mistress Rachel, in whose good graces he stood highly, now thought proper to put in his oar, to add to the mortification, as well as the confusion, of poor Juba, and twirling a bunch of gold seals which were suspended by a fanciful watch ribbon which nearly reached his knees, and replenishing his glass from a full bottle of claret which had just been imported from the cellar of Lord Fribble, he thus addressed the still indignant and scowling Juba:—

"'Pon honour, I am of opinion that you are no fool, Mr. Blackey, and so here's to you."

On which Juba smartly responded, not to the entire satisfaction of the serving gentleman—

"Me no negro neider, so dat's for you."

A laugh against Mr. Flowerdew certainly now prevailed, in spite of the respect in which they held his resplendent talents; and though Rachel was highly provoked at the reply of the black, she could not help slyly smothering a laugh beneath the folds of a cambric pocket handkerchief, strongly scented with the

odour of otto of roses, under the pretence that she had a violent attack of the tooth-ach. But from this very night Juba was treated with every mark of civility and politeness from the sagacious housekeeper and the pretty Abigail, fearful of the consequences which might ensue, if they adopted a contrary behaviour towards him, and very shrewdly suspecting that he was neither rogue nor fool in the estimation of his master, whom they both hated and feared, knowing the unbounded influence which he would possess over the mind of their lovely mistress while he continued an inhabitant of Stanmore Priory; and all Mrs. Wilkins's snug and agreeable parties, and private tit-bits of supper, were prudently suspended till Sir Hector Oldstock should take his departure from a mansion where, to them at least, he was so unwelcome a visitor. Not that they at all disliked the manners and appearance of his youthful companion, Ensign Conway; for a handsome young military officer had more charms for them than what they deemed a crabbed old veteran, worn out in the service both of Mars and Venus, and from whence he had retired only to live to be the torment of the one, and the plague of the other. These were the conclusive and very delicate observations of Mrs. Wilkins and Miss Rachel; and as they sat at supper over the choice and dainty dishes which were spread before them, the visitants of their lovely Lady frequently became the objects of their private conversation, which generally began on the part of the inquisitive Mrs. Wilkins, and in which she was very readily assisted by the pretty waiting maid, who, impatiently longing for the speedy exit of Sir Hector Oldstock from the

Priory, would often break out in the following manner:—

"I wish that black devil and his old fool of a minister were fairly gone,—don't you, mother Wilkins?"

"Lack! yes, to be sure I do, my dear," cried Mrs. Wilkins; "I vow and protest I am quite sick of their company, with their fidgeting every moment at one's elbow, in the housekeeper's room, and prying into every thing that don't at all concern them. I hate an old man, that's for certain; they are never satisfied."

"Oh to be sure, he is quite a bore," echoed Rachel, peeling a peach very deliberately with a silver-handled fruit knife, which belonged to her Lady; "I never go to dress my Lady but he is sure to pop his head in at the door, with Flora this, and Flora t'other, that it is full three hours before I can get her to put a thing on. If I was my Lady, I am sure I shouldn't have patience; but my Lady is so young, and so good-natured—"

"Yes, Lady Primrose is certainly a sweet creature, there is no denying that," observed Mrs. Wilkins; "and she has been a widow these two years;—what a wonder!"

"No wonder at all, if you knew what I do," cried Rachel, tittering; "there is a reason why some folks don't marry, when some folks cannot get the man to their mind, as the saying is. Now do you smell a rat, mother Wilkins?"

And the cunning Abigail laughed prodigiously when Mrs. Wilkins, now on the stretch of the most impatient curiosity, carelessly replied—

"Lord no, my dear, I smell nothing but that de-

lightful otto of rose which you have got in your pocket handkerchief, and which makes you all over like a nosegay. Well, my dear, you was saying that my Lady—look, Rachel, what a pretty cap you have got on to-day, child—how becoming to your complexion!"

"Do you think so?" now answered the highly gratified and conceited Rachel, (for in this quality she was by no means deficient;) "why, you must know that my Lady gave it to me, because I—I—I—happened to say something about her being married again; I am sure it was for nothing else in the mortal world, for she looked so pleased, and she blushed so; my gracious goodness! her face was as red as scarlet, mother Wilkins; so says I, 'My Lady'——and then says she, 'Rachel, what can you be thinking of?' 'Of matrimony, to be sure, my Lady,' cried I, 'what every woman thinks of; or if they don't think of that, they think of something else, and that's worse.' So my Lady laughed, and I laughed; and then we talked of other matters. I am in all my Lady's secrets, you know, mother Wilkins."

"To be sure you are, child, I know that; and a very fine thing it is to be thought worthy of my Lady's confidence,—very few but would wish to be in your place, Rachel; you get many a good thing by it," answered the sly Mrs. Wilkins.

"But I mean to get a great many more good things before I have done with her, I promise you," retorted Rachel.

"Yes, when my Lady marries again, there is no doubt but you will get all her clothes," added Mrs.

Wilkins; "money will purchase more, and she has plenty of it. Well, my dear, I wish you joy of the change that is going to take place in my Lady's condition. But who is the happy man, Rachel? Come, you may as well tell a body who is the object of my Lady's second choice. I hope he is young and handsome; she had plague enough before with an old man, I am sure, poor thing; I often pitied her, when I saw such a beautiful young creature hanging upon the arm that could scarcely support her. To be sure, my Lord Primrose was doatingly fond of her; but what did that signify? one likes to have something in the shape of a husband, don't one, Rachel?"

"Yes, and something in the shape of a man, I should think," cried Rachel, and burst into a fit of the most immoderate laughter, in which she was heartily joined by her chatty friend, who, still unsatisfied on one important point, again attacked the Abigail on the weakest side she possessed, and that was flattery, well aware that if this did not succeed, no other argument would draw the secret from her.

"I suppose there will be some change in the establishment at Stanmore Priory when my Lady alters her condition?" resumed Mrs. Wilkins; "you of course, my dear, will retain your situation."

To which Rachel smartly replied, but laughing all the while that she had tormented and tired out the patience of her civil and obliging friend—

"Change in a fiddlestick's end. Why, Lord, mother Wilkins, what a fool you are; who told you that my Lady was going to be married? not I, I am sure."

"Why, my dear, you certainly hinted at a—a—a something of the kind, did not you?" cried the disappointed Mrs. Wilkins.

"Lauk, you must be dreaming, mother Wilkins," retorted Rachel; "I never said any such thing; I only said that my Lady was in love, and love and matrimony are quite different, you know."

"Very different indeed, my dear," answered Mrs. Wilkins; "it is twenty to one whether they ever come together once in seven years. In love? Lauk-a-mercy, then it is all over with her. But how came you to find that out, Rachel?"

"Because I had eyes," replied Rachel; "and what use are eyes, if one don't make use of them, mother Wilkins?"

"Not much, I grant you," answered the housekeeper; and a pause ensued, not highly satisfactory to the one, and very little gratifying to the other; for both were now playing at cross purposes. Yet Rachel, loving to torment even the civil Mrs. Wilkins, again resumed the perplexing subject with—

"Yes, my Lady has catched it, to a certainty, and she might as well have caught a fever."

"Much better," answered Mrs. Wilkins, dryly. "But who is the man that has bewitched her? Not the young gentleman officer who is visiting here with Sir Hector Oldstock, is it? I don't think he is spirited enough for my Lady,—do you, Rachel?"

"Oh lauk, no, it's a finer man than him," uttered Rachel, tossing her head; "I shouldn't think him good enough for me, much more my Lady."

"Well, if it's not Mr. Conway, I may puzzle my

brains till a blue moon, and not be able to find it out," cried Mrs. Wilkins; "there's nobody visits at the Priory, you know, but Parson Evelyn, and Doctor Gilbert, and Lawyer Ferret, and I am certain sure it is neither of them. To be sure, my Lady has gone out a visiting lately more than usual;—stay, now I think of it, she went to a ball at the Countess of Stormont's, and there I suppose she saw——"

Mrs. Wilkins stopped.

"By goles, mother Wilkins, you have hit the right nail on the head," bawled out Rachel, "for there my Lady fell in love, or my name an't Rachel Fairface."

"Well, but she did not tell you so, did she?" cried Mrs. Wilkins.

"What signifies that?" retorted the Abigail; "don't I know it?"

"It don't seem like it," responded Mrs. Wilkins, now in her turn endeavouring to torment her antagonist.

"Did not my Lady tell me all about it?" cried Rachel; "did not she give me a full and particular account of the whole affair? nay, the very name of the gentleman that she danced with the whole of the evening? A fine young baronet, Sir Charles Ratcliff, of Ratcliff Hall, who has lately come into a vast estate. Do you think I am a fool, mother Wilkins?"

"Why truly, Rachel, I don't think you are very wise, to conclude that because my Lady danced with a man she is to fall in love with him," very gravely answered the housekeeper.

Rachel persisted that she was right, and Mrs. Wilkins persisted that she was wrong, and how long they

would have kept up the spirit of argument, is uncertain; for the chamber bell of Lady Primrose gave a loud peal at this precise moment, and reminded the Abigail that she had something more to do than to talk of the affairs of love or matrimony, which were now deferred to some more favourable opportunity, when she was resolved to renew the attack on her friend Mrs. Wilkins with increased spirit, and to maintain her argument. And that opportunity soon arrived, on the very day that was destined for her Ladyship to dine at the dowager Duchess of Pemberton's; for she had certainly observed an unusual flutter and agitation of spirits in her lovely mistress, which was increased during the time that she was in attendance on her. Tears filled her lovely eyes, and she sighed mournfully to several observations made by the Abigail on the fineness of the weather, and the beautiful ornaments she had been selecting to correspond with the elegant dress which had just been imported from the metropolis, and was composed of the richest and most tasteful materials, being one entire robe of fine lace, beneath which was a pale celestial blue slip of rich and delicate silk; so appropriate to the radiant complexion and attractive loveliness of Flora's shape, that when completely attired in it, with two drooping white feathers in a turban of blue crape richly adorned with pearls, she looked the loveliest creature in existence. Flora's tears, however, which had fallen like the dew on opening roses on her lovely cheek, were not only remarked by the cunning Abigail, but commented upon in the following manner:—

"My gracious goodness! my dear Lady, for Hea-

ven's sake let me go and bring you some Hungary water."

"For what purpose?" gravely demanded Flora.

"For what purpose, my Lady?" echoed Rachel, "only look in the mirror: your Ladyship's eyes are as red as a ferret's, which is a very great pity; because they are so beautiful; and—and—you are going out to dinner."

"There is no helping the effects of a cold, which I have been troubled with for some time," uttered Flora, in some confusion, and endeavouring as much as possible to conceal her agitation from the prying and curious eyes of her attendant; "however, you may go and bring the Hungary water, and I will just wash them a little before I go down stairs."

"Do, my Lady," uttered Rachel, in seeming anxiety at the dejection she betrayed; "I would not for the universe let Sir Hector see that any thing has vexed you, which any body may see with half an eye, though you don't say so: and it's a very great shame, so it is, that any thing should vex so sweet a Lady, who tries to make every body happy around her."

"But we don't always meet with a return of the kindness that we manifest towards others," cried Flora, gently sighing, and pleased even with the sympathy which she found, or imagined that she discovered in her attendant to relieve the burthen that oppressed her full heart; "not even by those we love dearest do we meet with commiseration or pity."

"To be sure we don't, my Lady," quickly answered Rachel, as she dipped the corner of a napkin into a silver bason, into which she had poured some of the

Hungary water, and delighted that she had at last succeeded in gaining the confidence of her lovely mistress, and that the cause of the involuntary agitation which she had that morning betrayed would very shortly be disclosed to her, she insidiously added, "no indeed, my Lady, I know very well what it is to love and never be pitied; they are trials of the heart, as Miss What's-her-name says, in her last new novel. Miss What's-her-name is a charming writer, isn't she, my Lady?"

Flora smiled.

"I really have not the pleasure of being acquainted with any of her productions," uttered she.

"Why then I would advise you to get some of them from the circulating library, my Lady," cried Rachel; "they are so pretty,—all about love, and crim. cons. and elopements, and ladders, and ropes, and dungeons, and caves, and old castles, and midnight bells, that ring without being touched, and spirits that fly through the air without any wings, and, ladies ravished nobody can tell how, and gentlemen murdered nobody can tell where. Oh, Miss What's-her-name's novels are delightful, and make one cry so! I would not give a rush for a book, if it did not make one cry over it."

At this moment a gentle tap at the door of the dressing-room announced a visitor: it was Henry Conway.

"Pardon my intrusion, I beseech you, Lady Primrose," uttered he, in accents at once respectful and timid, "but Sir Hector is impatient to behold you; you left him in a moment of—of—what shall I say,

loveliest lady?" added Henry, in the most blushing confusion.

Flora started up, and drawing a pair of white kid gloves on her lovely arms, smilingly exclaimed, while she linked one of them through Henry's—

"Positively nothing, Mr. Conway; I will hear nothing more of what passed between my uncle and me this morning: he was provoking, and I was saucy, as all we women are, you know, when we don't exactly happen to have our own way; but it is all over, and the sun shines again on our returning good humour."

"Ah! could there be a cloud to dim its lustre when you are present?" exclaimed Henry, as he led her to the drawing-room, where her fond uncle, with tears in his eyes, solicited her pardon for the intemperate warmth he had betrayed.

"But, gad zookers! if ever you find me guilty of it again, Flora"—— uttered he.

"I will make you suffer a court martial, uncle," cried the lovely widow, smiling with the most resistless fascination; and her l
long waited at the door, sh
lightness of a sylph. Sir H
took their stations, as usual,
man, received the commands
the utmost expedition; a
the carriage wheels were
Priory.

CHAPTER XXIII

"For aught that ever I could read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;
But either it was different in blood,
Or else misgraff'd in respect of years,
Or else it stood upon the choice of friends,
Or, if there was a sympathy of choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
Brief as the lightning in the collied night."

SHAKESPEARE.

DELIGHTFUL was the ride to the residence of the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, through a country diversified on every side with nature's choicest sweets. It was spring, when every tree was clothed in vernal green, every spray beginning to shoot forth its tender blossoms, and every bird to carol its song of melody through the neighbouring groves. A romantic prospect of scenery now burst on their view, as they approached a plantation of dark pines, which with the tall cedar and the majestic oak bordered the shady entrance of an avenue, leading to the magnificent mansion of the venerable lady, which her nephew had

so singularly given the title of the Round Tower;—but which, though a lofty and gothic edifice, no more resembled a round tower, in its form and structure, than a palace did a church; which, on their nearer approach to it, occasioned Sir Hector jocosely to exclaim—

"Why, gad zookers! this is the prettiest round tower I ever beheld in my existence, with this difference only, that there is nothing round about it, saving the clock: but I suppose in Italy they are fond of giving romantic names to certain things that have no more resemblance to the title they bear than I have to that of a Cherokee chief, who am now dressed in the military costume of an old English soldier."

"But perhaps there may be some resemblance to a round tower in the interior part of this superb building, which induced the Marquis of Rosalvie to name it such," cried Ensign Conway. "But names are surely not of the slightest consequence; for, as Shakespeare says—"What's in a name? That which we call a rose would smell as sweet, were it by any other name so called."—I believe I am right, Lady Primrose, am not I?"

Flora laughed, although she regretted that her uncle, notwithstanding his promise that he would never more offend her, had just started a subject which still bore some prejudice to whatever related to the Marquis of Rosalvie; still she smilingly replied to Henry, who had given the conversation so pleasant a turn—

"Yes, Henry; all you want is a Juliet, to make the part of your Romeo, which I perceive you have been studying, complete."

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"And I have a shrewd guess that he would be at no loss to find a Juliet, if he was just to take a walk over to the Rectory," uttered Sir Hector; "there is the prettiest little Juliet there imaginable, in the person of Miss Fanny Evelyn, is not there, Harry?"

Flora laughed, and the young soldier coloured up to his ears; but fortunately for him, at this moment the carriage suddenly halted, for they were now within sight of the gates of this truly splendid and magnificent old family mansion. Two large well-formed lions, cut in the purest marble, were placed on each side of the spacious gates, as if to guard the entrance, and had altogether a most striking and beautiful effect on the eye of the beholder; and in the centre of the grand hall were the figures of Faith, Hope, and Charity, inimitably executed, having been brought from Italy, as a present to the Duchess by her nephew, on his last continental tour. But no sooner was the carriage drawn up, and the name of Lady Primrose and Sir Hector Oldstock announced by her Ladyship's footman, than it resounded through the hall, and the Marquis of Rosalvie immediately descended from the staircase, to receive his aunt's visitants, and to conduct them to her presence in the drawing-room. When Henry handed her Ladyship from the carriage, which was generally the case when Sir Hector had preceded them, it was certain that the hand of Flora trembled, when the first hand to whom Henry resigned it was that of the Marquis of Rosalvie, who, as he conducted her up stairs, softly whispered—

"You are much paler and thinner than when I saw you last, Lady Primrose; let me hope that the change

which I now perceive has not been occasioned by any change in your domestic happiness. Your uncle has been a long visitor at Stanmore Priory, and perhaps he intends to reside wholly with you. His temper is impetuous, and, if I mistake not, suddenly rash and quick in quarrel; yours, mild and gentle as the breath of angels. I hope he does not exert that influence too warmly. Pardon me for a supposition so natural, so conclusive; yet when I behold those lovely features for a moment playing in a sphere so different from what nature taught them, I—I—feel—feel a"——

The Marquis, from some unaccountable reason or other, thought it prudent or absolutely necessary to make a full stop at these words; and Flora, from some unaccountable reason or other equally mysterious as his, did not exactly choose that he should guess at the nature of her sensations towards him, whom she most loved and most feared. Assuming a smile, therefore, of the most bewitching gaiety, she filled up the pause which his Lordship made, by exclaiming—

"Feel what, my Lord? What can you feel in aught that concerns the happiness or the misery of Flora?"

There is a look, there is a sigh, which conveys more than whole volumes can express, though language were most eloquent; and that look was now directed towards Flora by the Marquis of Rosalvie; and the half escaped sigh now reached her ear, and penetrated her heart, as he replied in tremulous accents—

"More than Flora feels, does Rosalvie feel; more than Flora thinks, or has ever dreamt of, does Rosalvie

feel in *all* that concerns her happiness, her honour, her peace of mind, over which he watches more sedulously, more jealously than misers watch their hoarded gold; not more devoutly prays the Indian for the rising sun, that he may fall down and worship it, than Rosalvie prays for the happiness of Flora: not more anxiously journeys the pilgrim to the Holy Land, to kiss the cross that he adores, than I to see the happiness of Flora concentrated in every earthly bliss, in every other pleasure: yet feeling this, I claim no other boon than friendship, than fellowship of kindly thoughts and cordial glances from the sweet smile of Flora."

The before enraptured Flora now involuntarily turned her blushing face from the full gaze of him who was inspecting every lovely lineament of its faultless grace, in which, fearful that he had discovered too much of its expression, and that he would there behold the disappointed hope with which the latter part of this speech had impressed it, faulteringly, though spiritedly replied—

"My Lord, I do not wish to exact any proof of friendship which appears in so constrained and mysterious (if you will permit me to term it so) a guise. Every one who knows the Marquis of Rosalvie must consider themselves honoured by his friendship; and I of course, who am almost a stranger, feel particularly happy that I am not excluded from the number of his Lordship's particular friends; but—but—I have—heard"——

Perhaps a resentful blush coloured the cheek of the lovely widow as she uttered this; and perhaps one of the prettiest pair of lips in the whole world pouted a

little, or perhaps a pair of the most brilliant and love beaming eyes darted an angry glance where most they would have bestowed looks of the most enraptured fondness: but certain it was, that the whole spirit and pride of a woman was summoned to her aid in making this reply to the Marquis of Rosalvie, and that she intended he should feel it; and feel it he did, for he was struck motionless with surprise, and coloured as deeply with resentment as he had occasioned the lovely widow to do only a moment before: and who could blame her? What could be more insufferably provoking, or tantalizing to a woman's feelings, than this mortifying and unexpected disappointment of all her dearest hopes and wishes, when she imagined that the look, the manner, and the language of the Marquis, which he had directed towards her, appeared so evidently the offspring of a much warmer sentiment than friendship—when she expected the fullest declaration of ardent and impassioned love from his own lips, to receive only a cold acknowledgment of his esteem, his respect, and his good wishes for her prosperity and happiness, and so forth, it was certainly enough to excite resentment in a far less feeling and sensitive bosom than that of Flora's; and if the young widow felt a disposition to retaliate in her replies to the cold-hearted swain, it was natural enough, after the repulse she had met with from him. And the Marquis coloured deeply on perceiving, from the downcast eyes of Flora, which had certainly sought any other object to fix their attention on but him, that she was offended with something he had uttered; but what that something was he could not tell, and there was no time to

make the inquiry, for they had now reached the entrance of the drawing-room, at the door of which stood the venerable form of the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, who, with a smile of the most conciliating sweetness, extended her hand to the mortified Flora, (who, however, concealed her sensations at the present moment with admirable success,) while she curtseyed to Sir Hector and Ensign Conway, and welcomed them in terms of the most friendly warmth and elegant politeness to their first visit at the Round Tower.

"For such I must perforce call it, to please my nephew," exclaimed she.

"And your Grace might with equal propriety call it the *round robbin*, to please your nephew," cried Sir Hector, very unceremoniously seating himself, and slyly taking a peep at the face of Flora, to try if he could guess how matters stood between her and the Marquis of Rosalvie, whom he had noticed, however, with a cordial salutation and kind inquiry after his Lordship's health.

"You are certainly right, Sir Hector," answered the Duchess, in great good humour, and occupying a place beside him; "Ormond might as well have called it the one as the other, although there is something like a round tower in a part of this edifice, the ancient history of which I am totally unacquainted with; but Ormond knows all about it, and is so interested in the particulars of it, that I do believe he has studied nothing else since he came from Italy, but the illustrious heros, and the nymphs, and the bards, and the druids, that formerly inhabited the ruins of this said Round Tower, when it was built by the Romans, some centuries ago."

"I should vastly like to hear that history, if you will be pleased to tell us, my Lord Marquis," uttered Sir Hector, fixing a scrutinizing glance on the changing countenance of the melancholy Marquis; for changing it certainly had been since he had conducted Lady Primrose to the presence of his aunt, and she received her with such delighted symptoms of approbation and pleasure; and he somewhat gravely replied to the request of Sir Hector Oldstock—

"The history of the Round Tower is briefly this, sir:—

"Celyddon, son of an ancient and illustrious family, formerly the possessors of this castle in feudal times, when grown up to manhood, was told by an oracle, that he was to have no wife but Olwen, whom he was to find out by overcoming and exploring the mysteries of a round tower, in which the lady was supposed to be confined by a tyrannical step-mother, who envied her for the uncommon and extraordinary beauty with which nature had so liberally endowed her. In order to accomplish his design, therefore, Celyddon repaired to the court of Arthur, to prevail on the king to perform the ceremony of cutting off the hair of his infancy, as was usually done to relations; and during this operation claimed the aid due to a nephew, and on obtaining a promise to that effect, explained who he was. A party was then sent by Arthur to gain information where Olwen was to be found, that beauteous maiden, in whose every footstep four white trefoils spring up; and after an unsuccessful search for a whole year, the messengers return, when Celyddon complains that all of them were blessed in the company of their pa-

unless except himself. This induces them to a second attempt, the party consisting of those who excelled in various sciences, who find at last the castle where the father of Olwen dwelt. Several adventures take place between them and the shepherd of this mansion, and they are informed that none escape with life who seek for Olwen; for her father was only to live while she remained with him. Olwen then appears in the house of the shepherd, and is described thus:—

"She was arrayed in a vesture of flame-coloured silk; a throng wreathe of ruddy gold was about the damsel's neck, wherein was set a precious pearl and rows of coral; more yellow was her head than the blossoms of the broom; her skin was whiter than the foam of the wave; her hands and fingers were more fair than the opening buds of the water lily, amid the small ripplings of the fountain of the waters; whiter was her bosom than the breast of the fair swan; more red her cheek than the rose of the mountain. Whoever saw her was filled with love. Four white trefoils were seen to rise in her way wherever she might come, and therefore was she named Olwen.

"Celyddon demanded her love. She tells him of her vow to stay with her father, to whom she refers him. At length he proposes conditions, to be fulfilled by Celyddon, and then he is to obtain the maid whom he so fondly loved, and had risked so many dangers for. But this the fates designed should never happen; for the lovers were separated—eternally—till, in softer and more congenial skies, their spirits were again united in realms of everlasting bliss; while the great Arthur and his warriors are laid asleep, and not to rise

until the enlightened period of the world, wherein they may appear, and accomplish their labours. In the Round Tower, 'tis said, or at least the story goes, that these romantic and fond lovers met, and that there they died: and I believe the tradition true; for in the mouldering ruins of this Round Tower, two figures cast in brass are still perfect, and have suffered little from the ravages of hoary-headed time. The one is a female, supposed to be the beauteous Olwen; the other a warlike hero, whom I take to be Celidon. She is in the attitude of bidding him farewell, and he forms a statue of deeply unutterable despair and speechless grief.

"And this, Sir Hector, is all I can tell you of the history of the Round Tower," concluded the Marquis, whose narration had been listened to with profound attention by Sir Hector; and although Florence's lovely face was turned towards the venerable lady of the mansion, she could not for the life of her help stealing a glance at the fine, handsome, marked, and intelligent features of the animated speaker, whose melodious, yet manly tone of voice vibrated on her heart with a sort of pleasing, yet painful pleasure, though she would fain have denied the power of his influence there.

"And do you believe in the credibility of this romantic tale, my Lord Marquis?" exclaimed Sir Hector, laughing heartily. "If so, you have more faith than I have of what passed a century ago; men knew no more Adam. One untruth is first told by some romancer of the age, and another succeeds to him, and another after that, and the foundation is then laid for ten thousand fabrications of the same nature, ridi-

culous as they are untrue, and absurd as they are romantic."

The Marquis coloured deeply. There was more of rudeness and sarcastic irony contained in this speech than occasion warranted, in any degree, on his first visit to a mansion where he was received with such marks of warm and disinterested friendship. But Sir Hector was the uncle of the lovely widow; and whatever propensity he might feel to retaliate on the severity of his sarcastic speech, he repressed it at the present moment, not only on account of the lovely object in question, but because Sir Hector was at this moment the guest of his venerable aunt; forcing a smile, therefore, of affected gaiety, he carelessly replied—

"I did not mean to infer that I believed this tale, Sir Hector; I merely related it to you as having heard it, although it is not of the slightest consequence to me whether it be true or not."

At this precise moment Lady Stormond's carriage drew up to the door; and when her Ladyship's name was announced, it was a happy relief to all parties, and particularly so to the pained feelings of poor Flora, who was more disgusted than ever with her uncle's pointed rudeness to the Marquis, as well as with his continued sarcasms; and fearful that it would at length occasion a quarrel between them, and excite the displeasure of the venerable lady who had invited them to her hospitable mansion from the purest motive of friendship and hospitality, Flora, much as she loved her uncle, felt highly dissatisfied with the tenor of his conduct, and heartily wished that he was again at Oldstock Hall, where, with his sister Liddy, he might

indulge the whimsicality of his capricious humour, without giving her pain, or making her friends (for such she considered the Marquis and his amiable sons) uncomfortable, by his petulant manner of displaying it. In short, Flora, kind, and frank, and generous as was her disposition, and open as was her heart, felt that her uncle was proceeding in a way with her that was extremely unlike to the life she had led with Lord Primrose, who delighted in every thought, in every wish of hers, and whose sole happiness consisted in making her happy, and in seeing her smile; but her uncle seemed to be pursuing a contrary method, by adopting a severity she could not understand, or divine the meaning of; and if she had not a husband whose wishes she was obliged to conform to, she did not see what right her uncle had in exerting his authority over her.

Thus pained, and thus mortified, the spirits of Flora were on the point of abandoning her, had she yielded to the influence which they had over her mind; but she made every effort to conquer her sensations, and to appear lively at the approach of Lady Stormond and Lady Sophia and Lady Emmeline, all of whom instantly saluted her with the kindest inquiries after her health, though all observed that she was much paler and thinner than when they last beheld her, all but Lady Stormond, and she gently chided both her daughters for making this observation to Lady Primrose; and approaching Flora, while she extended her hand towards her, with a bewitching smile she exclaimed—

"I really do not see any extraordinary change in you, my sweet love, since I had the pleasure of seeing

you last; you must not therefore believe what these naughty folks say to you, that you are looking ill; it is no such thing; and I appeal, for the truth of this assertion, to my very good friend, the Duchess of Pemberton, if she sees any alteration in your lovely person since we had the pleasure of your company at Stormond Lodge."

To which the dowager gravely replied—

"Lady Primrose is certainly looking as lovely; but (and I love to speak the truth, especially when I am called upon for its report) the observation of your daughter Emmeline is perfectly correct, that Lady Primrose is much thinner and even paler than when at Stormond Lodge; but let not that alarm you, my dear creature," cried the venerable Lady, surveying the now changing countenance of Flora with peculiar kindness; "you were able to lose a little of the *en bon point*, without its being any disadvantage to your figure; and while we are well and happy, it is no matter what quantity of flesh we bear about us."

"Yes, while I am *well* and *happy*, I have no reason to complain, your Grace," uttered Flora, suppressing an involuntary sigh; and at this moment the Marquis, who was leaning over the back of Lady Emmeline's chair, stole a glance at the face of Flora: her eyes met his, and the expression they conveyed was to crimson her with blushes too perceptible at this moment to escape the observation of the whole party; and but for the easy elegance and bewitching manner of the lovely and accomplished Countess, who, with peculiar address, turned the conversation instantly to a different channel, the feelings of the young widow and the

Marquis of Rosalvie had
only from the sarcastic
Russell, but the bitter
Sir Hector Oldstock; who,
blushes of his lovely niece
deeply heightened ones of
doubt remaining on his
felt the influence of a strong and ardent passion, which,
for potent reasons, both chose to conceal. No ob-
servation, however, was made either by him or Lady
Sophia on the confusion of the lovely widow; for a
look from her mother partly forcibly conveyed (what
she never dared transgress) her authority, which, on
particular occasions, her Ladyship was obliged to con-
form to.

The summons to dinner created a general bustle.
Henry Conway, being seated next to Lady Emmeline
Russel, had the honour of conducting her down stairs.
Lady Sophia had carelessly linked her arm in that of
Flora, (whether by design or accident, we cannot tell,)
so that the Marquis had no opportunity again of saying
any thing to her of a private nature, which certainly
was a mortification to both of them, as Flora was de-
sirous of making an apology to the Marquis for the
rudeness of her uncle, and to impress him with an idea
that it was by no means intentional or premeditated;
but this she could not do, as she sat at a distance from
him the whole time they were at dinner, and Lady
Sophia and Lady Emmeline entirely engrossed her
conversation afterwards.

"And is it really true, that you have dismissed poor
Clairville from the list of your dying swains?" cried

Lady Sophia, with an arch smile. "What cruelty, Lady Primrose, to have so many captives in your chains, and give no liberty to one of them."

"So many captives, Lady Sophia?" cried Flora; "I really do not know that I ever had one, or ever wished to have any. Lord Clairville indeed has honoured me with an offer of sentiments, which could I have returned with mutual ardour, I should not have blushed to own; but as I found it impossible to do this with honour, candour, or sincerity, I certainly did write a letter to his Lordship to that effect, stating my reasons why I could not accept that offer; and surely no one would condemn me for using that candour and honesty to others which I should wish they would evince towards me. You, Lady Sophia, would not make a man your husband for whom you could feel no warmer sentiment than friendship, would you? And not loving Lord Clairville, I of course could not, would not marry him. Can you then condemn me? or can his Lordship be offended with my only having acted with that candour that becomes every woman of honour to do, who professes to be one?"

The serious manner in which Flora had uttered this had some effect in repressing the rising propensity to laughter in Lady Sophia Russell, while in the eyes of the lovely Emmeline it produced tears; and she feelingly exclaimed—

"Condemn you, Lady Primrose? Ah, who on earth can condemn you for a conduct so noble, so ingenuous, so delicate? None but those who are divested of it, and perhaps would not play a part so honourable. Some ladies possessed of not one half of

your beauty, your merit, Lady Primrose, would not have so acted; and though I admire Lord Clairville, and think him a very amiable and accomplished gentleman, yet I know those who are equally so, and who are equally enamoured with the charms of Lady Primrose, and I am sure would make her as good and as worthy a husband,—don't you, Sophia?"

"Yes, Sir Charles Ratcliff is absolutely dying for her Ladyship," cried Lady Sophia, laughing.

"I don't mean Sir Charles Ratcliff," answered Lady Emmeline; and perceiving in what direction her eyes strayed, the young widow coloured deeply; for it was certain that the eyes of Emmeline were fixed on the Marquis of Rosalvie, who had entered into deep argument with his Lordship on the subject of horse-races, for which the Marquis was no advocate, and Sir Hector a very warm one. Henry, of course, was neuter, and heard every syllable that was passing between the ladies.

"Then there is *One, Two*, and *Three*, to the *Widow's Choice*, I suppose," cried Lady Sophia, "is not there, Lady Primrose?"

"I really am unconscious of having chosen one yet," replied Flora, highly disgusted with the sarcastic tone in which this was uttered; "but when I do, I will certainly inform Lady Sophia Russell of the *Widow's Choice*."

"Ah, that you won't, you sly creature," replied Lady Sophia; "we women are not so fond of telling the world what mischief that urchin Cupid has been making in our hearts; so the world is often deceived."

"And so it ought to be, for the world too often

deceives us," uttered Flora, with increased spirit and warmth; "but were I inclined to marry again, I should not consult the approbation or the opinion of the world at all about the matter."

"No indeed, nor I neither," cried Lady Emmeline; "for we very well know that it is not the world, but the man we marry, who is to make us happy, isn't it, dear Lady Primrose? You have been married once, so you can tell us all about it."

"Yes, my love," cried Flora, smiling at the artless simplicity of the sweet girl, "and that once has made me very cautious how I venture again on so perilous a path as the road which leads to matrimony; for believe me, dear Lady Emmeline, there are thorns as well as roses scattered around it. Some are so fortunate as to escape without being encumbered with the thorns, while others are wounded for ever with the bitterness of their smart. Think of it—reflect that there is no medium when this is the case; the path is before you, and you must walk in it, whether you like it or not, even to your life's end, if it is so destined by Providence."

"How thankful you ought to be to Providence, then, dear Lady Primrose," cried Lady Sophia.

"Why thankful, Lady Sophia?" warmly demanded Flora; "Lord Primrose was a most excellent and worthy man, kind and indulgent even to my faults. Why should I thank Providence for having deprived me of so good a husband?"

"Because it is very likely that Providence very kindly intends to help your Ladyship to a better," cried Lady Sophia, with a most provoking air of *non-*

chalence, at which it was almost impossible to resist laughter; but Flora just then was by no means in a humour to encourage any reflection cast on the memory of her late dear husband, and coldly replied—

"To help me to a better I can scarcely believe possible, for my Lord was"—

"Old enough to be your father," instantly responded Lady Sophia, now laughing; "and you are still so young, although you are a widow, that I should think Providence very ill-natured not to help me to a younger one, when I was at full liberty to make a second choice more agreeable to my wishes; that is, if I were you, Lady Primrose, and had so many dying in love with me."

"If you were me, Lady Sophia, I have the vanity to think you would do exactly like me," uttered Flora; highly provoked at her attempt to render her the object of her sarcasm; "though were I Lady Sophia, perhaps I should avoid wounding the feelings of another with ill-seasoned pleasantry, on subjects which did not in the least concern me; for whether I marry, or do not marry again, can be of no consequence to Lady Sophia Russell, or any other person."

"Yes, but it is of great consequence," retorted Lady Sophia.

"Why so? may I ask your Ladyship," cried Flora.

"Because every body who is unmarried, and are not likely to get husbands, wishes you pretty young widows to be out of our way," answered Lady Sophia, tartly.

"But that cannot surely be your case, Lady Sophia," cried Flora, "for I have very great reason to suppose

you did be in no danger of a rival in the affections of so honourable and amiable a man as Captain Ponsonby, to whom too you are just on the eve of being united; if you think so, you are not only paying a very ill compliment to him, but to yourself, to imagine that any other female would have the power of attracting him from you. Think more justly of so well tried and faithful a lover: all men are not inconstants, now all women frail."

"Indeed, but there are very few exceptions to that general rule," cried Lady Sophia, laughing; "and though Ponsonby"——

"Is behind you, sister," uttered Lady Emmeline, in a low whisper, and blushing that her sister had betrayed so glaring a mark of weakness and folly in the presence of Lady Primrose, as to induce her to believe that she was either jealous of Ponsonby, or that she envied the superior charms of the lovely widow.

Ponsonby had entered the drawing-room at the back of one of the attendants, and was actually unnoticed by the whole party, who were earnestly engaged in conversation, till the moment he appeared behind his fair mistress; and some laughter was excited, when, approaching Lady Sophia, he heroically exclaimed, holding out Walter Scott's beautiful poem of the Lady of the Lake,

"Never did Grecian chisel trace
A Nymph, a Naiad, or a Grace,
Of finer form, or lovelier face."

Now unfortunately the eyes of Ponsonby glanced,

though not intentionally, but because he could not help it, to the lovely face of Flora, when he repeated these lines, which not only excited an involuntary and deep blush on the transparent cheek of the young widow, but occasioned a much deeper and warmer one to kindle on that of Lady Sophia; for, in the first place, she was fearful that the last speech which she had been addressing to Lady Primrose had been overheard by Ponsonby; and, in the next place, she liked not the look which he had directed, although but a moment, on the young widow: yet whatever were her likings or dislikings, she concealed it at the present moment, and with affected coyness, as Ponsonby now took his station by her side, half pettishly exclaimed—

"Well, so you have brought the Lady of the Lake as last, Ponsonby; what a tedious while you have made me wait for it."

"Let him do penance then for past follies," cried the venerable dowager; "let him read the Lady of the Lake for the benefit of the company."

"Yes, I insist upon it," cried Lady Sophia. "Come, let us hear what she is really like; for various are the descriptions that we have been favoured with from history, sometimes calling her the witch of the lake, then the hag of the lake; but Sir Walter calls her his Lady of the Lake. Which of these titles originally belonged to her? Can you tell us, Ponsonby?"

"I really do not know but one title that originally belongs to her," answered Captain Ponsonby, "and that certainly is the title given to her by Sir Walter Scott, of whose beautiful and poetic fancy, the Lady of

the Lake is the legitimate offspring. What think you, Rosalvie?"

"There is not a doubt," replied the Marquis, "that the Lady of the Lake owes its existence to the creative powers of a Sir Walter Scott. But come, let us have it; perform your penance, if any request of a lady can be so termed; and one too whom you would willingly oblige, though at the expense of a little trouble."

"I would willingly oblige Lady Sophia Russell with any request that it is in my power to grant," uttered Captain Ponsonby; "but positively I cannot read poetry in the presence of you, my Lord Marquis, who are so great a judge of its composition. I resign, therefore, the Lady of the Lake into your hands, and beg that you will do her justice, and, for once, condescend to become my substitute on the occasion."

"Pray do, Ormond, read it," cried the Countess of Stormond, on perceiving that her daughter Sophia was not in the most possible sweetest of tempers with her enamoured swain; but for what reason, her Ladyship could not guess: and whispering something in the ear of Rosalvie, with whom her Ladyship being a relative of his aunt's warranted the liberty, the Marquis took the poem that was handed to him by Captain Ponsonby, and read aloud the following words, in a voice of melody, of manly expression, and a more than usual pathos in his manner, which attracted even the attention of Sir Hector towards him, and obliged him secretly to confess that he was certainly the most fascinating and irresistibly pleasing man in existence.

THE LADY OF THE LAKE.

"Never did Grecian chisel trace
A Nymph, a Naiad, or a Grace,
Of finer form, or lovelier face!
What though the sun, with ardent frown,
Had slightly tinged her cheek with brown,—
The sportive toil, which, short and light,
Had dyed her glowing hue so bright,
Served too in hastier swell to show
Short glimpses of a breast of snow;
What though no rule of courtly grace
To measured mood had train'd her pace,—
A foot more light, a step more true,
Ne'er from the heath-flower dash'd the dew;
E'en the slight hare-bell raised its head,
Elastic from her airy tread:
What though upon her speech there hung
The accents of the mountain tongue,—
Those silver sounds, so soft, so dear,
The list'ner held his breath to hear.

"A Chieftain's daughter seem'd the maid:
Her satin snood, her silken plaid,
Her golden brooch, such birth betrayed.
And seldom was a snood amid
Such wilds luxuriant ringlets hid,
Whose glossy black to shame might bring
The plumage of the raven's wing;
And seldom o'er a breast so fair,
Mantled a plaid with modest care,
And never brooch the fold combined
Above a heart more good and kind.
Her kindness and her worth to spy,
You need but gaze on Ellen's eye;
Not Katrine, in her mirror blue,
Gives back the shaggy banks more true,

Than every free-born glance confess'd
The guileless movements of her breast;
Whether joy danced in her dark eye,
Or woe or pity claim'd a sigh,
Or filial love was glowing there,
Or meek devotion pour'd a prayer,
Or tale of injury call'd forth
The indignant spirit of the North.
One only passion, unreveal'd,
With maiden pride the maid conceal'd,
Yet not less purely felt the flame;—
Oh need I tell that passion's name!"

At the conclusion of this well known and celebrated poem, so elegantly recited, the Marquis of Rosalvie was awarded with the praises of the whole company, not even Sir Hector Oldstock excepted, who allowed that his Lordship had done ample justice to the Muse of the ingenious and accomplished author:—

"Which, notwithstanding his unrivalled excellence, and persevering industry, and brilliant talent," uttered Captain Ponsonby, "some of the fastidious, or rather, I may add with great truth, the envious and censorious, have impudently asserted, are not the real offsprings of his native genius, but that he is indebted, for some part of the facility with which he composes his admirable well-wrought tales to the materials he collects from another. But who would give credit to so false and scandalous an aspersion, when he has so clearly proved to the contrary, and would no doubt severely punish the propagators of such a rumour, were he not too proudly conscious that such idle, vain, paltry, and invidious attempts to crush genius were beneath his notice, and for this reason treats them with the con-

tempt that they merit, convinced that it is [illegible] in the power of rancour, malice, or envy, to do him harm, while his transcendant talents are the gifts of all-bounteous Heaven, and the approbation of an admiring and judicious multitude. The insects that buz about the bright flame may singe their own wings by their feeble efforts to extinguish it, but they can never hope that it will less glow with vivid fire because they have fluttered round it."

"Surely not," observed the Marquis; "they cannot sully the brilliancy of so bright a luminary, although they may sometimes succeed with authors of less avowed and striking abilities, who are dependant on the wretched parsimony of the publishers. It is one of their maxims, when they cannot sufficiently assail merit, to endeavour to depreciate its shining excellence, by using every paltry means to depress it, by keeping their authors poor the very instant that they have gained the knowledge of their being so."

"Well, but my good friend," cried Sir Hector, "it is highly necessary that authors should always be in a state of poverty, or something approaching it, or I verily believe there would be no authors at all. No man in mortal existence would take the trouble of compiling forty or fifty pages without being paid for it."

To which the Marquis gravely replied, "Not having the honour of being an author, Sir Hector, I am inadequate to answer that question; yet I would presume there are rich authors as well as poor ones, whose plea is not necessity or poverty for their situation. There is a certain Lord, you know, who writes gratuitously."

"And plentifully too, you may also presume to add," cried Sir Hector; "so let him, if he is so fond of quill driving; I hope he will never leave off till the world is grown weary of his productions."

"That is a limit not very likely to put the finishing stroke to his Lordship's labours," retorted the Marquis; "for while there is wit and taste, or sentiment and feelings, his productions will ever be admired."

"Curse me if I think so," vociferated Sir Hector; "I, for one, disclaim any acquaintance with such a poet!"

"Oh fie! Sir Hector," exclaimed Lady Sophia, laughing; "his Lordship's poetry is divine."

"And is the general moral it contains equally divine, my sweet young lady?" inquired Sir Hector.

"Oh, but we are not talking of the morality of them," responded Lady Sophia, "but the beauty, the elegance, the style, is altogether bewitching, seducing, enchanting! Oh what charming scenes has he portrayed!"

"Very charming," dryly repeated Sir Hector; "but pray, Lady Sophia, which of his Lordship's charming poems has been the subject of your particular admiration?"

"One that hath a charmed sound in it," uttered she, with increased vivacity and spirit; "a forbidden one; for which very particular reason I was particularly anxious to see it: it is the privilege of we women, you know, Sir Hector, to like forbidden things, all owing to that naughty fair creature, Mrs. Eve."

"Indeed, but it is one of the privileges that I would not permit you to enjoy, were you a daughter of

mine," uttered Sir Hector; "and that particular book, which I can probably guess at the title of, I would particularly forbid you to read above all others."

"Oh what a barbarous papa you would make," cried Lady Sophia, laughing; "and I appeal to Lady Primrose, if she is not exactly of my opinion, that there is nothing so charming as a forbidden book!"

"Lady Primrose!" uttered Sir Hector; "I will be bound that Lady Primrose never read such a book in all her life."

"And never sighed for forbidden things," exclaimed Lady Sophia, without giving the embarrassed Flora time to answer the interrogatory of her uncle, and most maliciously glanced her eyes in a direction that could not easily be mistaken. They were rivetted on the face of Rosalvie; and the deep blush that crimsoned the lovely cheek of the young widow, was now reflected on his own.

Never had poor Flora felt so deeply wounded by the bitter sarcasm of Lady Sophia Russel; and never did Sir Hector feel so greatly for the embarrassment of his lovely niece; a sarcasm which she felt the more, because she could not reply to it in a manner that she could wish, without betraying emotions she was very far from wishing to discover at the present moment, and yet could scarcely conceal; and whether the pretty Emmeline guessed at her thoughts was uncertain, but she instantly made a pretext of inquiring, at this precise moment, after the health of poor Mrs. Melville and her lovely daughter; adding, with a sweet smile—

"And is it really true, my dear Lady Primrose, that

you are going to take Miss Melville under your protection? But how can I doubt it? You are always doing good for some one. Poor girl! there is little doubt but she will shortly lose her mother: Dr. Maitland was telling mamma only this morning, when he called at the Lodge, that he entertained but little hope of her recovery."

"I fear not," now replied Flora, who had by this time recovered her self-possession; "I saw Mrs. Melville a few days since at the Cottage, and from her altered appearance, am apprehensive she is rapidly approaching to the last stage of a decline. Her situation affected me most deeply; and I—I certainly did make her an offer, which was gratefully accepted."

"Well, my love, and it was an offer that reflects the highest lustre on your well known benevolent and amiable character," cried the Duchess, viewing the lovely widow with unspeakable delight and satisfaction.

"Indeed it does, Lady Primrose," exclaimed Lady Sophia, highly provoked with her lovely sister, that she brought the merits of Flora so conspicuously to view, and that Ponsonby, among the rest, would give her his share of praise for so amiable a trait of disposition. "It is really very liberal and kind of you; but are you not afraid of taking so young and unformed a creature under your protection?"

"No, Lady Sophia," uttered Flora, with some little resentment glowing on her lovely features; "it is the very reason why I should take her under my protection; and I have no fear that she ever will disgrace it. Miss Melville is young, certainly, but she is by no

means unformed; she cannot be unformed, when she has been reared and educated by a fond mother, who has taught her to prize the first lesson that a youthful mind should receive—a sense of piety, which can never be separated from a sense of female delicacy, truth, and virtue.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I did not take my leave of him, but had
Most pretty things to say: ere I could tell him
How I would think of him, at certain hours,
Such thoughts and such; or I could make him swear
The shes of Italy should not betray
Mine interest and his honour; or have charged him
At the sixth hour of morn, at noon, at midnight,
To encounter me with orisons, for then
I am in heaven for him; or ere I could
Give him that parting kiss, which I had set
Betwixt two charming words,—comes in my father,
And, like the tyrannous breathing of the north,
Shakes all our buds from growing."

SHAKESPEARE.

"ALL this I know that Miss Melville possesses; consequently have no fears of her not conducting herself in the most prudent manner, when she becomes an inhabitant of Stanmore Priory. For myself, I really do not see any particular merit in what I have done for a poor fatherless girl, who has no friend on earth to protect her but a helpless mother, rendered still more helpless by being in a state of sickness as well as poverty. Alas! she need not have a more

bitter enemy to encounter than that same chilling blast which so oft has blighted the fairest flower, and doomed it to perish."

If there was a charm that could be given to lovely woman, even when most lovely, she seemed to want no other; it was at this precise moment reflected in the face of Flora, as, raising her charming eyes, which had been cast down with the most bewitching and unaffected modesty, she beheld those of the Marquis of Rosalvie rivetted upon her; and she blushed a roseate hue more bright than the tints of morning, when first it breaks through the azure sky, when he energetically pronounced—

"*All* do not so tenderly consider the infirmities you speak of, Lady Primrose, and which bear so hardly on your feeble sex; helpless indeed, if they have no other protection than what the merciless and unfeeling world gives them. Nor can I sufficiently admire that true greatness of mind which you have just so amiably displayed in despising the illiberal and narrow prejudices of envy and ill nature, by taking a lovely girl under your roof, when no other roof is open to her: and however lovely Miss Melville may be, or however amiable, she can never diminish the loveliness or the merits of her charming protectress."

Flora bowed to so flattering a compliment, without being able to utter a sentence to thank his Lordship for the encomium he had bestowed; nor did he give her leave, for, on some trifling pretext, his Lordship arose, and suddenly quitted the room, probably to give the lovely object of his now openly avowed adoration time to recover from the confusion and embarrass-

ment that her blushes so perceptibly betrayed. After the absence of the Marquis, and the effect of the compliment had subsided on the mind and the heart (for we suspect that her heart felt it most) of Flora, a general conversation took place, the name of Miss Melville not being again resumed for that evening. The feelings of the whole party were, however, differently excited by the young widow being so exclusively the object of praise with the Marquis of Rosalvie. In the daughters of Lady Stormond it occasioned some involuntary surprise; but that of Lady Sophia was not unmixed with envy or jealousy; not that she cared much for any compliment of Rosalvie's, but she could not bear to hear any one complimented but herself; and she felt regret, and even mortification attending it, that she had been the cause of this eulogium being pronounced on Flora, by having dwelt on the perfections of Miss Melville, for no other purpose than to excite jealousy in the breast of the young widow, and to make her imagine that the lovely girl would, when under the roof of Staumore Priory, become her rival. But in this expectation, her Ladyship was most disagreeably disappointed. Under these circumstances, Lady Sophia felt uncomfortable, and heartily repented that she had mentioned Miss Melville at all. But far different were the sensations of the amiable Lady Emmeline; she delighted in the praises that were bestowed on an object every way so worthy of admiration, and that she herself so particularly admired. Moreover, Lady Emmeline had long suspected that the apathy and indifference that the

Marquis had evinced towards the charms of the beautiful young widow had all been affected: but now she was convinced that it was so beyond a possibility of doubt; and the blushes of Flora, on so publicly receiving the compliments of the Marquis, was a testimony too striking of the value she set upon his praise. But what were the sensations of Sir Hector Oldstock, no one could tell, for he was in the middle of one of his old campaigns with Captain Ponsonby during this eulogium, pronounced on the merits of his beloved niece, and he either did not listen to it, or pretended not to do so.

Meanwhile Henry, who was seated next to Lady Emmeline, to whom he shewed the most respectful attentions, without being considered too familiar or presuming, experienced a similar pleasure with this amiable young creature, on hearing the compliment bestowed on her lovely friend, whom he promised would, at no very distant period, be no longer a Primrose, but a flower transplanted to the gardens of Rosalvie, where she would preside as the reigning queen of beauty.

At length the hour of departure arrived. The carriage both of Lady Primrose and the Countess of Stormond drew up to the door, and a general muster of scarfs, pelisses, and bonnets, took place; and the Countess, standing close to Sir Hector, exclaimed in a whisper—

"Nay, you cannot, will not, be so barbarous as to refuse me this one favour; it is the birthday of my dear Emmy, and you must come; I have only a pri-

vate select party of friends, I protest, some of whom are the present company. We shall be quite snug and comfortable."

To which Sir Hector, in as low a whisper, replied—

"But, my dear Countess, I have arranged all my plans, and made up my mind to set off for Oldstock Hall to-morrow evening; and when once I have made up my mind to do a thing, I don't like to alter it."

The Countess smiled, (and the smile of this lovely and accomplished woman was fascination itself,) and she exclaimed—

"Not when a woman is in the case? Don't you know the old saying, my good Sir Hector—when a woman is in the case, all other things should give place? But since I have no influence to prevail on you to favour us with your company to dine at the Lodge to-morow, I will call my little Emmeline to you, and she shall positively coax you into compliance."

"Well, dear Countess," answered Sir Hector, "since you are resolved to take me by storm, I must even surrender; for he must be invulnerable indeed, who has the power to withstand a siege, where beauty is the commander-in-chief of the forces. I tell you that Flora is quite tired of her old fashioned uncle, and wants to get rid of him."

"That I deny," cried a melodious voice behind him, (and that voice was Flora's;) "I could wish, dear uncle, that you would always remain with me, or at least till I tell you that I am weary of your company. But pray, dear Lady Stormond, don't believe

my uncle, for he does not always speak the truth when he is finding fault with his Flora. She is a little saucy, I will grant; but I hope want of affection to the dearest relative I have on earth is not amongst the number of my failings."

The Marquis of Rosalvie was close at her elbow; and she coloured deeply as she glanced her eyes towards him, and there discovered an expression of something very like anger at the speech she had just directed to Sir Hector Oldstock, who, however, after a few moments consideration, consented to become one of the party who were invited to dinner at Stormond Lodge on the following day, to commemorate Lady Emmeline Russel's birth-day.

"Dowager, you will not make it late to-morrow," cried the Countess, as she bade her venerable friend good night."

To which she replied—

"My dear, you must blame Ormond if I am; he is positively grown the most indolent creature imaginable; instead of rising at six, as he used to do when he first arrived from Italy, he sleeps all day, and sits up all night poring over his studies."

Lady Sophia, now muffled up to the throat with a Swansdown pelisse, in the fear of catching cold from the night air, and seeing Flora by the side of the Marquis, determined that she would not depart without saying something to retaliate for the compliments he had been paying that evening to the young widow; and briskly advancing with an air of the most provoking *nonchalence*, glancing slyly at the blushing cheeks of Flora, she exclaimed—

"Ormond at his studies! A very likely matter, indeed, unless he is studying something lighter and more pleasing than the book of philosophy. What think you of Orlando, in Shakespeare's comedy of As You Like It? What a pretty Orlando you would make, if you could find a Rosalind equally romantic as yourself! What a pair of turtles you would make in a forest! And how you would sigh to the breeze, and murmur her name to the limpid brook! With what ecstasy would you pronounce,

> "Run, run, Orlando, and carve on every tree,
> The fair, the chaste, and inexpressive she."

What a pity, I say, that your Lordship hath not a Rosalind to imitate your heroic virtues."

And fixing her eyes full on the face of the blushing Flora, Lady Sophia curtseyed, and bade her Ladyship a good night; the Marquis eying her in the most indignant silence. But to have quarrelled with Lady Sophia, he well knew, would have been to quarrel with Ponsonby, who must perforce have resented any offence given to her Ladyship; and as the Marquis by no means wished to wound the feelings of an amiable and honourable man, he forbore to make any retort for such unblushing and unprovoked effrontery; while poor Ponsonby endured a severe penance in being obliged to listen to her sarcastic and ill-timed pleasantry, without pointing out to her the impropriety and indelicacy of such a conduct, when the lovely object was present to whom she had so artfully directed her insinuations. But Flora had too much good sense, as well as good manners, to notice it in any other way

than by coldly and distantly returning her Ladyship's laconic good night, as she gave her hand to the Marquis to hand her to the carriage, in which, as usual, her whimsical uncle had preceded her, and was already seated in his usual place, when Flora arrived under the arm of the Marquis, who, bidding a cold good night to Sir Hector Oldstock, (for he had thought him insufferably rude the whole time that he was their guest,) the carriage drove off for the Priory.

During their ride an almost universal silence prevailed. The gratified feelings of the young widow were indeed of too transporting a nature to be revealed to mortal ear; for she could not now suppose that she was an object of indifference to the Marquis of Rosalvie, and her heart bounded at the thought. But these pleasurable sensations received a check, when, on her reaching the Priory, she found a letter from her beloved Fanny Evelyn, imparting to her the melancholy, though long expected intelligence of the death of poor Mrs. Melville, who had that morning quitted her earthly tenement for ever, in the arms of her deeply afflicted and amiable child, and in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn, and the worthy Dr. Maitland, who had been sent for on the very instant that the alarming change in her became perceptible. He had arrived in time to administer, in some degree, a momentary relief to her anguished sufferings: but all his assistance shortly proved unavailing; the awful messenger of death had already arrived, and she expired amidst the tears and the heart-felt grief of those who had beheld her patient sufferings, and her exemplary Christian fortitude in that inevitable hour, which,

sooner or later, must attend us all. Poor Miss Melville was at present inconsolable; and although she had been daily and hourly expecting this calamitous event to take place, yet when it had actually arrived, she sunk under the conflict of her anguished feelings. Mr. and Mrs. Evelyn had done and said all that circumstances would permit on so melancholy an occasion, to console the grief, and calm the agitation of the amiable and now afflicted orphan.

"My father and mother requested me to say, my dear Flora," added Miss Evelyn, in her epistle, "that if you can favour us with your company to-morrow at the parsonage, my father will receive any instructions you may think it necessary to give him respecting the funeral of the deceased Mrs. Melville. Pray come soon, dear Flora, that we may enjoy a comfortable chat together.

"Ever yours,

"*Frances Evelyn.*"

No sooner was Miss Evelyn's melancholy news imparted to Sir Hector and Henry, than they both sympathized with the feelings of Flora, and felt for the grief of the amiable orphan.

"Gad zookers! how unlucky that you cannot postpone your visit to the Stormond's. For my part, I should make no ceremony at all about the matter; were I you, Flora, I would send early to the Lodge to-morrow morning, and let her Ladyship know of the event which has taken place, and that you cannot join the party as intended. What say you, Flora? You can easily get off, *if you like* to do so; and I am sure

I would prefer infinitely the parson's company to any of theirs."

Never was the young widow so completely at a loss for a reply, and never had she exhibited so much embarrassment; and though certainly, in her engagement with Lady Stormond, she could very easily get off, as her uncle had styled it; yet she was by no means inclined to make any such arrangement; and colouring deeply, replied—

"I cannot see the necessity, my dear uncle, of behaving so absolutely rude to Lady Stormond, and wounding the feelings of the gentle Emmeline, or—or—I—mean to say that there is no necessity for—I mean, uncle, that"——

Sir Hector was looking full in Flora's blushing face, as she stammered out these words, which threw her into such confusion, that she found it impossible to proceed; while he exclaimed, in no very pleasing accent—

"Well, Flora, I am waiting with great anxiety to know what you do mean, for curse me if I can form a notion. It is very possible that the sight of *one* party at Stormond Lodge may be more agreeable to your feelings than that you will encounter at the Rectory. Is that what you intended to say?"

To which the young widow now indignantly replied—

"I have positively nothing to say, uncle, to a supposition so ill founded: but I will never depart from truth, any more than I should like to do from good manners, and plainly tell you, that were I to decline going to the Countess of Stormond's to-morrow,

agreeably to promise, that I should be guilty of a most unpardonable breach of good manners, as well as delicacy; and yet it is nevertheless my intention to visit the Rectory. I would be as cautious of giving offence to *one* party as I would to the other. However you may please to interpret my conduct on the occasion, I would act with propriety to every one who is entitled to my friendship, respect, or gratitude."

And without uttering another sentence, or entering into any unpleasing discussion with her uncle, who seemed determined, even in this instance, to continue his sarcastic raillery towards her, Flora sprung from her seat with that elastic spirit which was in all her words and actions, and hurrying to her chamber, burst into a flood of tears, which she had no longer the power of suppressing; and she bitterly reflected, that though blessed by all-bounteous providence with every human blessing that unbounded wealth could bestow, she yet wanted the most essential blessing in this world's earthly space, and that was happiness, and that sort of happiness, which, in her present state of widowhood, it was not possible for her to enjoy. And Flora sighed deeply as she contemplated the sweet picture, as so truly drawn by the inspired and animated poet, of that condition of happy mortals, which she now no longer fancied would be her's.

> "Domestic Happiness, thou only bliss,
> Of Paradise that hast survived the fall!
> Though few now taste thee unimpair'd and pure,
> Or tasting long enjoy thee! too infirm,
> Or too incautious, to preserve thy sweets
> Unmix'd with drops of bitter, which neglect

Or temper sheds into thy crystal cup;
Thou art the nurse of Virtue, in thine arms
She smiles, appearing as in truth she is,
Heav'n-born, and destined to the skies again.
Thou art not known where Pleasure is adored,—
That reeling goddess with the zoneless waist
And wand'ring eyes, still leaning on the arm
Of Novelty, her fickle, frail support;
For thou art meek and constant, hating change,
And finding in the calm of truth-tried love
Joys that her stormy raptures never yield.
Forsaking thee, what shipwreck have we made
Of honour, dignity, and fair renown!"

COWPER.

Poor Flora dwelt on reflections so bitter, till a fresh gush of tears started to her eyes; and the image of Rosalvie, all graceful, eloquent, and elegant as he truly was, floated across her youthful fancy, and arrayed him in ten thousand more additional charms. And Flora thought of her late husband too, who, in despite of the disparity of their age, had yet been a fond, kind, and indulgent husband. She had loved him too, as far as sober love would go, without being accused of insincerity towards him. She had never felt the romantic passion that now filled her breast for Rosalvie; nature forbade it; for she was May, and he was January. Still Flora loved Lord Primrose, because he loved her, and treated her with kindness, had made her his wife, and at his demise had left her in possession of a title and a large property, which, except in one instance alone, she was the sole mistress of. Doubly, therefore, was the memory of her departed lord entitled to her respect and her gratitude, and it was cherished by Flora with veneration; nor had she

done any violence to her inclinations, in marrying him at the command of her father, because her heart was free from any other attachment; and she had not then experienced the invincible power of that little blind deity, who having once let his quivers fly at random, dooms it for ever to rankle in the victim's heart. But now Flora felt, for the first time, the influence of that deity, ever since she had beheld the Marquis of Rosalvie, and, unconscious of its power, knew not by what name to hail the new-born little stranger who had so suddenly found a shelter in her snowy breast. Vain had been her efforts to banish him thence; he was stationary, and would not be cheated of his lovely prize, although she had called woman's pride to her aid, and even resolution. But what has resolution to do in the affairs of love? Ask philosophy; ask the prudent, wise, and cautious sage, and he will tell them he has no charm to banish love, no antidote to calm and silence its tumultuary beatings; for philosophers and sages have both been under its tyrant sway.

But to proceed. Flora could not account for the prejudice which her uncle had so strongly imbibed against the Marquis of Rosalvie, or for the severity he had so lately adopted towards her in all that related to him, otherwise than by the mere caprice and singularity of his disposition, that could never bear contradiction, and because he liked the Earl of Clairville better. He had taken a dislike to the Marquis of Rosalvie, without having just grounds for so doing, or supposing that he had any pretensions towards her. In short, the conduct of the Marquis had evinced perfectly to the contrary of such a conjecture; and it was quite un-

reasonable, as well as ungenerous, of her uncle, to treat with such unmerited severity an object every way her equal in fortune, and far more than her equal in merit and accomplishment, and in exalted rank. Besides, it was also a point of extreme indelicacy, always in the presence of a third person thus to rate her about her supposed attachment for this most amiable young nobleman; it was going beyond what even relationship allowed him to do. She was certainly, by the death of Lord Primrose, her own mistress, and rendered by him independent of any relation she had in the world; and if she was at liberty to make a second choice, she had unquestionably a right so to do, without consulting the inclinations of any one else. And she determined in future, that dearly and affectionately as she really loved her uncle Hector, he should not control her on the subject nearest her heart. With this resolution Flora went to bed, desiring Rachel to call her at an early hour, as she had particular business to transact with Mr. Evelyn, and should probably go to the Rectory before breakfast. Flora then informed her waiting maid that Mrs. Melville, who lived at the White Cottage, was no more, and that she had promised to take Miss Melville under her protection; a piece of intelligence which much confounded and surprised, but by no means pleased Rachel; for she could not bear to have a rival in the good graces of her lovely mistress, and very unceremoniously replied—

"Lord, my Lady, what will you do with such a young person as Miss Melville at Staumore Priory? Why, lauk-a-mercy, she will be no more use to you

than my grandmother, Polly Hopkins. For certain sure you cannot treat her like a servant, because they do say that she has never been bred up like one; and you cannot treat her like a lady, because she is poor; and you kept old madam and she upon charity. It would be a pretty thing, indeed, to have Miss Melville turning up her nose at your Ladyship's servants, and giving herself the airs of a fine lady, when all the world knows that she is nothing more than a beggar. Lauk, my Lady, I am quite surprised at your bringing such a person here, that's what I am," cried Rachel, more warmly; "there will be no bearing it, I am sure."

"I can tell you one thing, Rachel," cried Flora, highly provoked with her insolence, and the manner in which she had spoken of Miss Melville, "that I will not suffer you to give your tongue such improper liberties; and I furthermore inform you, that I shall take whom I please under my protection, without thinking it an essential point to consult my servants at all about the matter; and that when Miss Melville comes to reside beneath my roof, I not only expect, but positively command that she may be treated with respect, and that kindness which a young lady of her merit is so justly entitled to; or remember, Rachel, that all who choose to act contrary to my wishes shall immediately be dismissed from my service."

This hint was sufficient; and Mrs. Rachel, who never saw her lovely mistress under the influence of so much anger before, was absolutely petrified, and stammering out a sort of awkward apology for the indiscretion she had been guilty of, curtseyed and left

the room, wishing that Miss Melville was at the bottom of the fish-pond before she had drawn her Lady's compassion towards her, and fully determined to become her most mortal enemy the moment she came beneath the roof of Stanmore Priory. Such were the charitable intentions of Mistress Rachel towards an innocent and amiable young female, who had never injured her in thought, word, or deed, and who had so recently been made a wretched orphan. But of the malice that was intended to her in the mansion of her lovely protectress, fortunately for the poor girl, she was yet ignorant; or what had been her sensations, to find that the very moment that her dear, suffering, and only parent had breathed her last sigh, while yet she remained a clay-cold corpse, she was doomed to be the object of bitter rancour, and malevolence, and scorn! The very thought had been sufficient to have annihilated the existence of the frail, delicate, and timid Amelia, whose tender, gentle, and affectionate heart wanted no additional pangs to revive the recollection of her departed mother, in witnessing whose expiring moments, she had almost become the victim of her anguished and torn feelings. The last conversation she had held with her beloved parent was the day preceding that on which she departed this life; when, calling her to her bed-side, she addressed her in the following affecting words:—

"Weep not, my child, that I shall shortly be released from all mortal sufferings, and that the only regret I now experience, in quitting a terrestrial existence for a heavenly one, is the pang that your tender heart will sustain when I shall cease to sojourn on

earth, and you will no longer have a mother. For you only do I heave a sigh, or shed a tear, at leaving a world in which I have tasted nothing but sorrow, and sustained nothing but injuries. But yet the hand of Heaven was in it, my Amelia, and we ought neither to repine nor murmur at its dispensations, however painful to bear. Still there is one soothing thought, that even in this bitter hour of separation with my dear child, consoles and cheers my fainting spirit, which lingereth only for thee; I leave you in the hands of a kind and generous angel, who will never desert you. You will also be introduced to exalted rank, and doubtless, my dear child, will be the object of admiration and of praise. But beware, my Amelia, in the gay and brilliant circle by which you will be surrounded, of a train of idle flatterers, whose insidious compliments, though they are intended to convey a great deal, yet mean nothing. Beware how you encourage such to approach you under the assumed mask of friendship, much less of love; by which last semblance you may the more easily be deceived. Let a mother's caution, therefore, put you on your guard. It is true, that in the presence of your amiable benefactress, there is little danger of such idlers as I have described being permitted to approach you; but your youthful inexperience will not always protect you against the powerful influence of accomplished and pleasing objects, when aided by superior rank and exalted station. Consider them wisely, and avoid temptations that are dangerous, and trust them no farther than the most scrupulous delicacy and prudence allow. Circumspection, my Amelia, should form the leading feature

of a woman's conduct; it should be the natural bias of her disposition, from which, whether married or single, she should never depart; it is her protection, and her best security from a base insidious world, where virtue hardly goes unsuspected, if circumspection is not her companion. Beware of attentions from all men, till convinced of the nature of their attachment. Remember, my Amelia, that you are portionless; you have no fortune to throw away on every individual who approaches you in the character of an admirer. But at the same instant, I feel myself most imperiously called upon to offer you the intimation as a mother on the eve of departing this life, as anxious for the peace and safety of a beloved child; yet be assured that I do not entertain the smallest doubt of the purity of your heart, or the propriety of your conduct, for which, as a leading star, you have constantly before you so bright and lovely an example as Lady Primrose. And although my Amelia is not destined to move in that exalted sphere in which her protectress is, who shines with such unrivalled excellence; yet it is always in her power to emulate her amiable conduct in the divine propensities of her nature. Follow her steps in the more private and sequestered walks of life, and unquestionably you cannot do wrong; for you will there behold all that is good and excellent in the character of lovely woman. Do you remember the first day that we beheld Lady Primrose, when we accompanied her and Mrs. Evelyn to the village church at Stanmore? Have you any recollection of the words she pronounced at divine service? You cannot forget them, for they were engraven on

my memory, and on each heart, at the moment when she uttered them;—'I have set God always before me!' These were the words of Lady Primrose. The notes of the organ swelled to the pealing anthem; her melodious voice joined in the strain, and all eyes were directed towards her. Did you observe the pious enthusiasm which then mantled her celestial countenance, and which at this moment shed such peculiar and irresistible graces around her? And did you mark the modesty of her attire, so plain and so unadorned? And why was Lady Primrose so unadorned? Because, my Amelia, she came to worship him who receives the homage of the heart, and does not regard the outward garment in which we are clothed. Go thou, and do likewise, my child, and you will not fail to render yourself acceptable both in the eyes of God and man. Then shall your virtuous graces, both of mind and feature, arrive at full maturity, expanding like the beauteous rose to meet summer suns, without a cloud to dim its lustre. So may future blessings and tranquil happiness be yet in store, and smile on the youthful and innocent days of my beloved child."

Such were the concluding words of Mrs. Melville, and the last she ever uttered in this transitory existence; and which made so deep an impression on the heart of the lovely girl, that they were never afterwards to be effaced from her memory. It was no wonder then that Miss Melville longed impatiently to behold her lovely benefactress, after the event had taken place which had deprived her of her maternal guide and monitress, and that she hoped to find in Lady Primrose, all that her mother had foretold. Nor

was Miss Melville disappointed in this pleasing hope and expectation; for Flora arose at an unusually early hour the ensuing morning, and rode over to the Rectory, while her uncle and Henry Conway were absorbed in pleasing slumbers, and was greeted by her most attached friends with the most rapturous welcome. She informed them immediately of the indispensable engagement she had that day at the Countess of Stormond's; but depositing a most liberal sum of money into the hands of Mr. Evelyn, for every arrangement that was necessary for the funeral expences of Mrs. Melville, desired him to take the whole direction of it on himself, and to tell Miss Melville, whom she now considered as her adopted daughter, that she would call on her at the Cottage on the ensuing day, an indispensable engagement, which she had previously formed, preventing her from seeing her before.

"In the mean time, dear Evelyn," cried Flora, tears starting in her lovely eyes, "say all you can to compose the spirits of the dear afflicted girl; and tell her, that though I cannot supply to her the loss she has sustained in the death of her dear maternal friend, yet I will endeavour to make her comfortable and happy."

"And how enviable and blest with such a protectress!" exclaimed Mr. Evelyn, as he conducted Flora to her carriage; for she frankly told Mrs. Evelyn with a smile of the most fascinating sweetness, that she could not stay with them long, and Fanny having stepped over to the Cottage, her visit was extended to a much shorter date; nor could Mrs. Evelyn even

prevail upon her to stay and take breakfast, so solicitous was Flora to put her uncle into good humour for the remainder of the day. She appeared, on her return from the Rectory, in so delightful a good humour, that it was not possible for him to be angry with her even for a moment; a full account being given of the reception she had at the Rectory, nothing further was said on the subject of deferring her visit to the Countess of Stormond's: and Flora immediately repaired to her dressing-room, where Rachel was in attendance to decorate her lovely person, not presuming again to intrude her familiar conversation on her too kind and indulgent mistress.

The attire of the young widow was, on this day, selected by her own taste and judgment, from her Ladyship's magnificent wardrobe, and consisted of a dress composed of the finest cambric, partially interspersed with the most delicate borders of lace, which sat close to the waist, and open at the bosom, and was richly trimmed with lace and small rows of white ribband, with tassels and girdle of the same, the whole costume of which carried an air of simplicity and delicacy about it, well calculated to display the spotless mind of the lovely wearer, at the same moment that it was so tastefully contrived as to set off her charming figure to advantage. She wore no other ornament on her bosom, the snowy whiteness of which might have contended with the Arcadian lily, than a beautiful little cornelian heart, which was suspended by a gold chain of the most costly value. Her beautiful tresses were negligently arrayed with a bunch of delicate moss roses, over which hung two drooping

white feathers, which harmonized with the bewitching radiancy of her ever-blooming complexion. And when completely adorned, she made her appearance in the drawing-room, there was never a more lovely being under the created heavens; and Sir Hector, gazing on her with sensations of the most unspeakable pleasure, rapturously exclaimed—

"Gad zookers! Flora, you have certainly a design on the hearts of all mankind to-day, and will kill by dozens."

To which Flora smilingly replied—

"Indeed, my dear uncle, I have no such intention; for, unlike the famed Cleopatra, I have no Mark Anthony that I wish to draw in chains."

"Look in my face, and tell me that again, Flora," slyly answered Sir Hector, taking the snowy hand that was held out towards him with the sweetest smile imaginable; and the carriage having drawn up to the door, Flora made but one spring into it, fearful of encountering any additional raillery on the subject of the Marquis of Rosalvie; after which, the carriage immediately drove off with the utmost expedition to the elegant and fashionable mansion of the Countess of Stormond.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Good name in man or woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:
Who steals my purse, steals trash, 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed."

SHAKESPEARE.

IF virtue may be defined a disposition capable to prefer the rights of others to selfish gratifications, whenever they are found to be incompatible, no one will deny, that to practice virtue as well as to talk of it, (which many do without one single atom of it in their hearts,) both a firm mind, and a good and highly cultivated understanding are essentially required; first, to resist temptation from habitual conscious worth; and lastly, to know when the rights of others justly interfere with individual pursuits, or domestic duties. But as virtuous characters are extremely rare in this world, and even kind dispositions not very common; probably if selfishness had been denominated the usual source of

human actions, the term would not so frequently be misapplied, and humanity and friendship would not so oft amount to a libel on our natures. But it is pride that is disgusted at the mirror held before it, and that endeavours, under the mask of virtue, to hide the contemptible figure it makes, when stripped of its borrowed finery and ornaments. We are told that the dignity of human nature is disgraced by such a representation; as if the dignity of human nature can be disgraced by a portrait to which it bears no resemblance, and which is expressly drawn from an original, where dignity, above all things, is wanting. If we cannot hope to see the reign of virtue established amongst us, let us at least unmask pride, and by exhibiting our nature as it is, make us ashamed to want charity for the frailties of others, from the honest consciousness of our own follies and weakness.

Now these were the reflections of our young and lovely widow during their ride to Stormond Lodge, which, it was probable to conjecture, arose for more reasons than one in her imagination, and had certainly cast a sombre hue on her beautiful, animated, and lively features, which attracted the attention of Henry Conway in no small degree towards her; and she blushed deeply on his exclaiming, somewhat abruptly—

"Dear Lady Primrose, how grave you are."

To which, however, she smilingly replied—

"Yes, a little or so; I was just then thinking of grave subjects, Mr. Conway, which require gravity, you know."

"And I protest, Flora, so was I," cried Sir Hector; "we are both of a mind. I was thinking of the

Marquis, and wondering whether, in the course of this day's visit, he would entertain us in his usual way, giving us details of the stars, and the moon, and every planet that has a hard name to it. I was thinking how vastly pleasant it would be, if one was inclined to be chatty and agreeable,—wouldn't it, Flora?"

To this question, so asked, Flora only replied, with the calmest composure—

"Really, uncle, as the Marquis of Rosalvie was not the subject of my thoughts, or the object of my serious contemplations, it would be folly to talk about what I was not thinking about, whatever your thoughts may be on the occasion."

But the head, in spite of our utmost efforts to conceal it, is always the dupe of our heart; and Flora's roseate cheeks tacitly acknowledged that the Marquis had formed a part of her serious reflections. But who was to know that? The god of love is so sly and insidious in his marches and counter-marches, that when he is resolved to besiege a fortress, he does not tell us when and where he is prepared for the attack. And Flora felt that he was besieging her heart as fast as his power could possibly extend; but happily for her, the carriage suddenly drew up to the gates of Stormond Lodge, where they presently alighted, and on their names being announced, were immediately ushered into the drawing-room, where already an elegant assemblage of company were present, many of whose faces Flora remembered to have seen on the ball night: but the first to pay his devotions to her, on her coming into the room, was no less a personage than the pretty conceited, and fashionable young baronet,

and her most passionate admirer, Sir Charles Ratcliff, who, a little intimidated by seeing her uncle, Sir Hector Oldstock, close at her elbow, kept at a profound and respectful distance from the lovely object of his attraction: but the Countess of Stormond, having advanced to welcome and greet her guests with her accustomed ease and elegance, introduced the dandy baronet to Sir Hector, and made him afterwards on the most easy terms with himself; and he immediately accosted Flora, though with a less familiar air than formerly, with—

"Divine Lady Primrose, I have languished a whole age in tortures, since I had last the superlative felicity of beholding you!"

"A whole age, and not expired yet?" cried the lively voice of Lady Sophia Russel, who, having crept close to the elbow of the baronet, to pay her respects to the Primrose party, was enjoying the confused looks of Flora at being so gallantly addressed by the young baronet, while she equally rejoiced at the embarrassment of Sir Charles; "my patience, and not dead yet?" uttered she, with peculiar irony; "I would not give a rush for what you men say of a woman's bright eyes, if those eyes cannot kill, at one single glance, the victim of their smiles. But pray now, Sir Charles,—why don't you die, and end your cares at once, here, in the presence of your fair captivator? For I am sure there's nobody will miss you, no, not one."

And having uttered this saucy speech, away she trips to the other end of the room, leaving Sir Charles in the most awkward situation that was possible to conceive, as it was just at the moment that Sir Hector

was surveying him with the most supercilious contempt.

Meanwhile Flora did not retain her situation near the baronet long, for she was assailed on all sides with inquiries after health; and Lady Emmeline having soon joined her, the baronet was foiled in his attempt of approaching her for the remainder of the evening, the Countess either engaging her in conversation, or the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, who arrived at a late hour. There was an air of tender melancholy both in the manner and the look of the Marquis, as he respectfully made an inquiry after her health, that penetrated the heart of Flora; but she dared not glance once towards him after he had spoken to her, and she had no opportunity of holding any conversation with him, as he sat a distance from the part of the room in which she was stationed, and whether by accident or design, sat close to Lady Emmeline Russel, with whom he seemed in the most earnest and interesting discourse.

Flora could not help thinking that his salutation to her uncle was more distant, studied, and reserved than on the preceding day, which was attended with pain and mortification to her feelings not to be expressed, as her uncle evidently appeared hurt by it. General conversation very soon took place, and a very sumptuous and elegant entertainment, of the most magnificent kind, crowned the natal day of the lovely interesting Emmeline. Still it was a formal one, and, on the whole, far less pleasing to the feelings of Flora than any she had passed at Stermond Lodge. But this was easily to be accounted for; for the strange

and inconsistent conduct of the Marquis perplexed and pained her to an almost insupportable degree; for only once, all lovely as she was, had he directed his eyes towards her; but even that single look spoke volumes, for that once was when Sir Charles Ratcliff had again contrived to obtrude his conversation on her.

"Adorable Lady Primrose," softly whispered the enamoured baronet, "what exquisite delight it affords me to see you looking so divinely! Loveliest creature! I was taught to suppose that your health had suffered lately; but it has had no effect on those heavenly features, or the delicacy of that radiant complexion,

'Which, brighter than the tints of rose,
Ten thousand beauteous charms disclose.'"

The latter part of this gallant speech being heard by Lady Sophia Russel, who was chatting with her enamoured swain, Ponsonby, she laughed so immoderately as to occasion her mother to give her a look highly expressive of her feelings, at the same moment that she made Flora endure the most uncomfortable sensations, by attracting all eyes towards her; and certainly Ponsonby, who was aware of this tormenting propensity in her disposition, and had actually, when alone with her, vainly endeavoured to suppress it, felt pained and displeased that she should either have singled out Sir Charles Ratcliff, or Lady Primrose, for the particular objects of her sarcastic raillery; and gently reproving her in a whisper, and pointing out to her the extreme indelicacy of such a proceeding, she desisted, although with a very ill grace, and became pet-

tête with her lover during the remainder of the evening. In short, Ponsonby, although passionately attached to Lady Sophia Russel, was not insensible to her faults, or blind to her imperfections, and had of late discovered so many defects in her disposition, that there were peculiar times, when he reflected how soon the period was approaching when he should enter into the most solemn and sacred ties with such a woman, and half repented that he had gone so far as to render it impossible for a man of honour to recede from his engagement. But Ponsonby only made these serious reflections when his mistress was not present. The moment she appeared, with all her witchery of charms, (for Lady Sophia was really an elegant and lovely young woman, with all her faults,) he forgot that when married, if her temper did not improve, he was likely to render himself a most miserable and unhappy man; and it was possible that her Ladyship received no advantage in the eyes of her lover, by his making a comparison with her merits, and those of the beautiful young widow, whom he would have preferred a thousand times to any female he had ever yet seen, had he once imagined there was a certainty of his success in obtaining an interest in her affections: but this, he very clearly perceived, there was not the most distant chance of; and that the Marquis of Rosalvie was the happy and envied man who was destined to be the object of her second choice; for Flora could not conceal the passion that triumphed in her heart; in spite of woman's pride and woman's art, it had of late betrayed itself in too perceptible a manner to every discerning eye, which was one cause why Lady Sophia

Russel, who had long discovered this important secret, had been so unmercifully severe on the feelings of Flora, and her relation, the Marquis of Rosalvie. With the latter, however, she was more cautious, well knowing he was one of those characters that would not bear an attack made upon his feelings, without giving the retort courteous in a manner that his fair relative would not have relished; in consequence of which, she said but little to Rosalvie about his *penchant* for the lovely widow: but when he was absent, she did not preserve the same silence, which frequently gave rise to little pettish quarrels with the generous Ponsonby, who could not bear wantonly to sport with the private feelings of another: and the sentence he had so softly whispered in Lady Sophia's ear, was precisely this—

"Oh Sophia! how you distress and pain my feelings by the continual display of ill nature (I can call it nothing else, my dear creature) to those objects whose happiness or misery, with respect to the attachments of the heart, does not, or ought not materially to concern you. Why, why, Sophia, do you continually indulge in this cruel propensity? Surely Lady Primrose has a right to bestow her affections on whom she pleases, without being exposed to either raillery or censure on the subject; and, with equal propriety, has your relative Rosalvie. Cease, cease, dearest girl, to cherish a disposition to torment, so unworthy of yourself, so wounding and ungenerous to the feelings of others; and do not pointedly offend objects who do not offend you."

Long before the conclusion of this salutary address,

Lady Sophia pouted, and grew pettish with her lover, and drawing her chair at a distance from him, angrily exclaimed—

"What is it to you who I choose to be severe with, I should be glad to know? You are mighty anxious about what is said to Lady Primrose, methinks. I am sick of hearing her very name, for my part; for what with you, and my sister Emmeline, and Ormond, and a thousand other persons beside, I can hear nothing but Lady Primrose all day long: it is enough to give one the surfeit, these bold, forward, upstart widows, who, I verily believe, marry old husbands on purpose to get rid of them, to try their chance with every young fellow that comes within the pale of their acquaintance. I wish, from my very soul, by way of puhishment to these flirting creatures, that the same custom was established as among the Bramins in Malabar, that when their old husbands die, their young wives should be buried with them on a funeral pile. How charming that would be for us young girls; for I protest that I hate widows; and were every man of my taste, they should whistle for a husband, and be condemned to wear their widow's weeds as long as they live."

The look and manner of Lady Sophia was so truly comic, when she uttered this saucy speech, that to have resisted laughter would have been morally impossible; and Ponsonby laughed as much as delicacy and good breeding would permit him in so large an assemblage of company; and without being observed, more softly exclaimed—

"But your dislike to widows, my Sophia, does not

extend to *old*, or *ugly* ones, does it? It is only on such a widow as Lady Primrose that you would have the law of the Bramins put in force, and exercise so barbarous and unnatural a practice. Come, speak the truth, now,—was not Flora so young and so handsome, you would have no objection to her? But, my dear girl, she cannot help that, you know; and I have a shrewd notion, that if you dislike her as a widow, your prejudice will not last long; your cousin Rosalvie will prevent her having recourse to a funeral pile, before this day six months; and the widow will have no wonderful dislike to ascending with him the marriage bed, or I shall be greatly deceived in my calculations, for it is plain enough to be seen that she loves Rosalvie, and, spite of his efforts to conceal it, or his mysterious manner of shewing it, that he loves her with equal fervour. Don't you subscribe to my opinion, Sophia?"

"I don't think any thing at all about the matter," pouted her Ladyship.

"Then why do you talk about it?" demanded Ponsonby, drawing his chair a little closer to the offended beauty. "But come, we will say no more on the subject; and if you had not forced me to speak thus ingenuously, I should neither have thought of Rosalvie or the widow at all, when I have a much dearer object so near to my heart. Sophia, can you blame others for having a fellow-feeling with ourselves? It is probably the first love of Lady Primrose, although her second choice; and why should you condemn her for a feeling so natural, if you, Sophia, feel the influence of that feeling yourself?—How did you like the set of

pearls I sent you this morning? and why have you not worn them, in compliment to your sister's birth-day?"

The snowy hand which now half rested on the back of Ponsonby's chair, more by design than accident, was a tempting object in a fond lover's sight, and he could not resist the fair opportunity he now had of securing it, and clasping it within his own; which, however, was three times attempted to be withdrawn, although a smile played in secret ambush on her roseate lips, which could not deny that he had some influence there; and she made some trifling excuse for not putting on the pearls, ending with an observation which the generous and kind-hearted Ponsonby could have spared—

"Lord, what is the use of wearing any thing that every body else wears? Lady Primrose is eternally decked out in pearls, which are far more rich and valuable than mine; and this is the very reason why I did not choose to wear them; I had no other reason: I cannot bear to copy any one in their dress."

"Nor yet in their manners, I perceive," uttered Ponsonby, much hurt by a continuance of such excessive folly; "you are an original then, it would appear, and will bear no comparison with merit or beauty. Well, my love, retain your own character, for in that you first charmed me; but let me never regret that on a nearer and more sacred connection, you infuse into it a portion of bitterness that may eventually deprive you of those charms which first secured your power over the heart of your devoted Ponsonby. No man in his senses will long remain the

slave of woman's love, when she forfeits that claim to it by a tyrannic sway. The god of love is a gentle one, Sophia, and must be treated gently, or it flies the unkind hand that would arrest its liberty; it would break the cage that would make a prisoner of its dearest, sweetest privileges, and sigh for freedom, although the voice was melody that allured it back again, and the form was beauty that fascinated its eye, still it would fly to more airy regions, in search of bliss that was denied to it. Sophia, I am that bird, and you my mistress; but, my dearest angel, make me not your captive, or perchance you lose the little trembler, which now is all thine own."

These were the words and the good night of Ponsonby, as he quitted this evening, at Stormond Lodge, the idol of his affections. But never had Lady Sophia felt so humbled and so mortified as by this well seasoned and justly merited rebuke; and never had she more felt the real value of a faithful and fondly attached heart. In fact, it was the only system that could bring her Ladyship to her proper senses; and the fear of losing him was greater to her than any other apprehension, and made her act in a very cautious manner how she offended him again.

When the hour of departure arrived to the Primrose family, Sir Hector Oldstock took a formal leave of the Countess of Stormond, and the same of the dowager Duchess of Pemberton; and when he extended his hand to the Marquis of Rosalvie, his parting words were expressed in a somewhat singular and whimsical manner—

"My Lord Marquis, health and happiness attend

you, and success in your further researches in the book of philosophy. I shall leave behind me a pupil of nature in my darling Flora; perhaps your Lordship, in the absence of a foolish, fond, doating old uncle, will sometimes take a peep in at Stanmore Priory, and be kind enough to give her a few practical hints on the leading star that brightens happiness, either of man's or woman's prospects of felicity; or, in other words, my Lord, you will go and see my Flora, and enliven the gipsey's spirits, when she is thinking of her old uncle, and they may be a little depressed or so. You will promise me, my Lord, that when I am far away, you will be a friend to my Flora."

The tear was starting to the eyes of the veteran soldier as he grasped the hand of the Marquis, who, astonished and perfectly confounded at the change in his manner of addressing him, betrayed considerable emotion, when, cordially returning the warm pressure of his hand, he exclaimed—

"Be a friend to Lady Primrose, Sir Hector! Can you doubt it? Does that man exist, who, seeing and knowing the virtues of that angelic creature, would not be a friend to her, who would not glory in becoming her dearest friend, the guardian of her honour, her peace, her happiness? No, Sir Hector, there cannot be a man, bearing the human form, that would not boast of so enviable, so dear a title, as being considered the friend of Lady Primrose."

To which Sir Hector, not a little anxious to give a home stroke to the already subdued feelings of the Marquis; and remarking the deep crimson that had flushed his cheek at the bare mention of Flora, half

earnest, and yet apparently half in jest, jocosely replied—

"Yes, and I do believe, that many, my Lord, would like to add another title to that of being distinguished by friendship only; the title of being husband to so pretty a creature, with so pretty a fortune, would be a very snug thing to a man inclined to sail down the stream of matrimony;—what say you, my Lord?"

A deeper flush coloured the cheek of the Marquis; for he not only felt the abrupt indelicacy of such a remark, but was aware of the motive which had suggested it, namely, curiosity, which, at the present juncture, he was by no means willing to gratify. Recovering his self-possession, therefore, after a moment's pause, he calmly replied—

"Doubtless, Sir Hector, he would be enviable; but surely the former would be a sufficient magnet of attraction, without any mercenary views on the latter consideration. The man who loves, and loves truly the woman of his heart's selection, marries *her*, and not her *property*; however wealthy her possessions, her heart is the only shrine that he adores. I, for my own part, would despise wealth, were wealth considered the most powerful incentive for a man to marry. However, it is a subject that I have not lately had in my calculations."

To which Sir Hector most incautiously, and certainly most indelicately, replied—

"But you have been married *once*, have not you, my Lord?"

A deep gloom overshadowed the fine intelligent features of the Marquis, an involuntary shuddering pa-

vaded his whole frame, and heaving a mournful sigh, he exclaimed—

"It is true, Sir Hector; and though a period of ten long tedious years has passed since that fatal contract bound me in eternal misery, infamy, and disgrace, the agonized recollection of all my former wrongs, heaped on my head by one of the most ungrateful and treacherous of women, now bursts on my memory, and opens afresh those wounds which the lenient hand of time was endeavouring to heal. To you, Sir Hector, I am almost an entire stranger; but I was not so to the late Lord Primrose; he was my most confidential friend, and well knew how deeply I was afflicted, and how deeply I was injured. While in Italy, I held a correspondence with my most attached and inestimable friend, to whom I had fully imparted the whole of the domestic calamity which had so suddenly overtaken me. In return, he gave me sympathy, and the condolence of a sincere and faithful friend. Our correspondence then ceased, from some unavoidable causes, for a considerable length of time; one of which was, that, no longer able to endure my former residence in Italy, which I once considered as the home of my earthly paradise, I set out on a continental tour, and was absent for a continued length of time. On my return to Italy, I found some letters had been addressed to me by several of my correspondents in this country; one of which was from Lord Primrose, in which he informed me that he had just formed a matrimonial connection with the daughter of Sir Oliver Oldstock, a lovely young creature not more than sixteen years of age. He then entered upon an accurate description of

the loveliness of her person, and the superior loveliness of her mind, comparing her to a wild and lovely blossom of simple nature, innocent as sweet."

Tears of rapture now flowed down the furrowed sun-burnt cheek of the veteran soldier; and hastily brushing them off, he interrupted the Marquis with sudden exclamation of—

"And so she was,—gad zookers! so Flora was; though I never saw her at the age of sixteen, yet I will take upon me to say that she was the sweetest creature in existence. Well, my Lord, well, so my Lord Primrose wrote you word that he had married Flora, and that he himself was old enough to be Flora's grandfather?"

To which the Marquis gravely replied—

"No, Sir Hector, I cannot recollect that he furnished me precisely with this information in his letter; but I can only recollect that he expressed all that a fond and adoring husband could say in praise of a lovely virtuous wife. A period after this elapsed of a considerable time, when I heard from Lord Primrose again. He complained of ill health, and appeared to feel a melancholy presage that he was not destined long to be an inhabitant of this world's earthly space, and lamented that his young and lovely wife would then be left without a protector to her inexperienced youth. His Lordship's letter then contained some further particulars, with the most solemn and serious injunctions, which, at present, I do not think it necessary to disclose. A time may come, when every transaction of the late Lord Primrose, with respect to his property, and his motives for addressing me on the

subject many months prior to his demise, will be fully and satisfactorily explained, not only to his lovely and amiable widow, but to all those busy, and I may add, meddling and officious persons, who have presumed to cast an injurious and ill-merited reproach on the conduct of my noble friend."

So unexpected a communication and disclosure from the lips of a man whom he had not once imagined had ever known Lord Primrose, much less that he was in his private confidence, absolutely confounded, and almost deprived Sir Hector Oldstock of the power of uttering a sentence. In the meanwhile, the Marquis, conscious only that he had uttered the sentiments of a man of honour and the purest integrity, preserved a sort of calm and dignified composure, neither wishing to intrude, or to retire from the confidence which Sir Hector, from some apparent cause or other, seemed anxious to repose in him. But the Marquis was strictly on his guard, and would suffer no man to worm his secrets out of him in the sort of way that Sir Hector had attempted to do, although the uncle of the adored Flora. There was an extreme indelicacy, as well as impropriety, in Sir Hector, relative to the inquiries he had made respecting the state of his affections with Lady Primrose, which, circumstanced as he was, the Marquis was resolved he would never reveal. That he loved the bewitching Flora, was beyond the possibility of a doubt, and that perhaps she was the only woman he had ever truly loved with that delicate and pure affection in which friendship was combined with love. But although conscious that he almost adored the lovely widow, he did not choose to have a confes-

sion of his love for her extorted from his lips even before he had made that confession to her himself. But Sir Hector did not long permit silence to reign between them unbroken; and having recovered from the first surprise into which he had been thrown by the unexpected intelligence of the Marquis of Rosalvie, he exclaimed, still on the very rack of curiosity and impatience—

"But, my Lord, don't you know any thing of the singular will that my Lord Primrose made just before he died, and that my niece cannot make a second choice without the consent of a Lord Arundel, who was appointed, in the last will and testament of her dying husband, a guardian over the large property he left behind him; the one-third of which Flora is to forfeit, if she marries again without consulting this guardian's inclinations. Do you know this Lord Arundel, my Lord?"

To which the Marquis, after a moment's pause, replied—

"I cannot deny that I am on some terms of intimacy with the man you speak of."

"Gad zookers! how lucky," uttered Sir Hector, drawing his chair closer to that of the Marquis, and lowering his voice almost to a whisper; "how fortunate, that you should happen to know something of Flora's guardian! Then I shall hear all about him, and his concerns, and when he intends coming to England; and above all, what kind of a personage this Lord Arundel is."

"Sir Hector, there are points of delicacy which forbid me to disclose a man's faults and failings, when

we happen to know them," answered the Marquis.

"What, then, he has failings, has he?" quickly replied Sir Hector.

"Doubtless, every man has his faults," replied the Marquis, gravely, "and Lord Arundel is not without them."

"But perhaps he has a great number of faults," cried Sir Hector; "some cursed crabbed old hunks, who, not being a fit subject for youth and beauty himself, would willingly prevent others from tasting of its sweets. Poor Flora! she had enough of an old husband, without having the additional mortification, after he is dead and gone, to be tormented with an old guardian. But you have not yet told me, my Lord Marquis, what sort of a man this Lord Arundel is."

The peculiar and whimsical manner in which Sir Hector made this inquiry, would have made it an utter impossibility to have resisted laughter, had not the Marquis of Rosalvie lost all patience at his continued attempt to cross examine him with respect to the state of affairs of the late Lord Primrose; and with a firm and dignified composure, he replied—

"Sir Hector, when Lord Arundel appears before you in the character of being guardian to one of the loveliest creatures in creation, you will then behold what sort of a man he is; and he himself will be able to convince you that he is no unworthy guardian to watch over so sacred and so dear a treasure; but till that period arrives, I must positively beg leave to decline giving any further outline of his Lordship's character. I have candidly avowed to you that I know,

and I feel that he has faults; he does not, would not disown them; but if he has faults, he has also virtues, which it is the pride and glory of his existence to cherish with humanity, truth, and justice towards his fellow men, and that whatever his failings, he never yet committed an action that would not bear reflection."

Sir Hector was now silenced, at least till he finally arose to follow Flora and Henry Conway into the carriage, which had long drawn up to the gates of Stormond Lodge, Flora wondering what could possibly have detained her uncle so long in the antichamber with the Marquis of Rosalvie, or what was the nature of their private conference together; and on the approach of her uncle to the carriage, in which she was already seated, her heart fluttered, and her lovely cheek crimsoned, when the Marquis pronounced, as he once more bade her uncle farewell—

"Peace and health, the two most desirable blessings in human life, attend you, sir. When we meet again, you will know more of the character of Rosalvie than you do at present. Lady Primrose, I will do myself the honour of calling on you to-morrow at Stanmore Priory, if you will not deem me an intrusive visitor. Here is your uncle, who will not deny that he has given me permission to obtain a title which every man who has once seen Lady Primrose would be proud to possess,—that of being your Ladyship's most undisguised and sincerely attached friend."

Sir Hector smiled, and Flora bowed, and the carriage immediately proceeded to Stanmore Priory; and during the ride, the utmost silence prevailed.

"Your Ladyship appears to be suffering much fatigue to-night," cried Henry Conway, observing with some concern the pale and agitated looks of the lovely widow.

To which Flora tremulously replied—

"Yes, I am actually weary of gay and festive scenes, Henry, for which nature certainly never designed me, and begin to long to enjoy the sweets of my own fire-side, without the intrusion of so much fashionable and gay company."

Sir Hector now perceived that tears were starting in the lovely eyes of Flora, and that what she had asserted was no affectation of her feelings, for she looked both pale and spiritless when he took her hand, and pressing it fondly to his lips, exclaimed—

"Yes, my love, it is true that you were never formed for dissipation, and that you are weary and disgusted with the unmeaning round of noise and folly, where there is neither pleasure, rationality, or happiness to be expected, and no real friendship is to be found. Not that I include the Marquis of Rosalvie among the number of the gay and the thoughtless; no—I think better of him: we have had a long conference together, and I have gained some information from him that will occasion you some surprise. Flora, do you know that the Marquis of Rosalvie has an intimate acquaintance with your guardian, Lord Arundel, and he also was the friend of your late husband, with whom, when in Italy, he kept up a regular correspondence? Did the Marquis ever tell you this, Flora?"

To which the perfectly astonished Flora, in the utmost embarrassment, replied—

"I have heard the Marquis speak of my late dear Lord, certainly, but he never told me that he had any knowledge of my guardian, Lord Arundel."

"Whom he describes as a man having many faults," cried Sir Hector, "with many virtues."

"And is not this the original picture of all mankind, uncle?" cried Flora, with an arch smile; and the carriage stopped at the gates of Stanmore Priory.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar!
Ah! who can tell how many a soul sublime
Has felt the influence of malignant star,
And waged with Fortune an eternal war!
Check'd by the scoff of pride, by Envy's frown,
And Poverty's unconquerable bar,
In life's low vale has pined alone,
Then dropt into the grave, unpitied and unknown."

BEATTIE.

THE ensuing morning, at an uncommonly early hour, Sir Hector Oldstock arose, and, accompanied by Ensign Conway, went over to the Rectory, to take his farewell of the amiable family of the Evelyns, intimating that he should shortly return, after having made some arrangements in the family mansion at Oldstock Hall, and making a proper settlement on his sister Lydia for life, that previously to his setting out for Florence, he would come and pass a few weeks at the Rectory. At which Mrs. Evelyn, perfectly surprised at this sudden intelligence, (while the blushing cheeks

of Fanny betrayed the interest her heart took in the information,) exclaimed—

"To Florence, my good Sir Hector? Are you then going to Florence? I am prodigiously surprised to hear it, particularly as Lady Primrose never once hinted at such a thing."

To which Sir Hector, observing the flutter of spirits into which Miss Evelyn was evidently thrown by this sudden intelligence, replied, with an arch and cunning smile—

"No, madam; I do not know how my niece could possibly inform you of such a circumstance, when she did not know it herself. I do not always let Flora into my cabinet secrets, Mrs. Evelyn; for she is a woman, you know, and it is a rare wonder if any woman can keep a secret four-and-twenty hours after she is made acquainted with it. What say you, Miss Fanny?"

"Why really, Sir Hector," cried the blushing Fanny, "I think you libel our sex in pronouncing so severe an opinion; for it is well known that your sex more frequently betray secrets than we do."

"Yes, in love affairs you mean, Miss Fanny," quickly retorted Sir Hector; "they are very sly in matters of that kind, I know."

Fanny blushed a deeper crimson than before, and Mrs. Evelyn, feeling for the situation of her lovely daughter, on some trifling pretext, sent her out of the room; and Henry, who felt for the embarrassment of the idol of his affections, being seated next to Mrs. Evelyn, she softly whispered—

"And do you accompany Sir Hector to Florence, Mr. Conway?"

would much rather she had preferred that nice civil gentleman, Lord Clairville; yet I am more reconciled since the private conference I had with him last night at the Countess of Stoutland's: it was of a most particular nature, and I am now perfectly convinced that he is a man of honour and integrity."

Without inquiring into the nature of this very particular conference, Mr. Evelyn immediately replied—

"Neither the honour or the integrity of such a man as the Marquis of Rosalvie, in my opinion, could ever admit of the slightest doubt, Sir Hector."

"Perhaps not, Evelyn," cried Sir Hector, raising his voice a pitch higher, "perhaps not; but some men who seem to possess both honour and integrity in their affairs with women, are often without one atom of it."

"Every man of honour, who loves a woman of honour, will act as such," retorted Mr. Evelyn, "and with delicacy and feeling towards the more frail part of the sex. He is no man who would abuse or triumph over the weakness of the sex. Let her situation be as public or as unfortunate as it may, a woman claims protection, and every man who is not a mere sensual brute, will give it to her when she stands in need of compassion and support. Now I must confess that I know of no man more likely to evince this manly quality of disposition than what I have heard of the Marquis of Rosalvie, of whose character report has not erred in speaking thus favourably; and if indeed our lovely Fleta has so deep an interest in his heart, I congratulate her in obtaining such a conquest."

"Well, I think she has, gad zookers! I am pretty certain that the Marquis is twenty fathoms deep in

love with her," cried Sir Hector. "He talked of friendship, to be sure, and of the high respect and esteem he held for the lonely widow of his valued friend, the late Lord Primrose, with whom, it appears, he was on terms of the greatest confidence; and how much he respected the amiable qualities in Flora's disposition, and that it would be the proudest aim of his ambition to be considered worthy of the friendship of such a woman: but this is all stuff, you know, Evelyn, for fear I should discover that he was downright in love with her, and sound him on the subject. It is all nonsense of a man talking of feeling nothing but friendship for so pretty a woman as my niece; we know mankind better, don't we, Evelyn?"

"I do not know that this rule may not have some exceptions, notwithstanding," cried Mr. Evelyn; "it is certainly possible for a man to have a friendship even for a pretty woman, without being a captive to her charms. Not that I have the slightest doubt that the sentiment the Marquis entertains for Lady Primrose is both love and friendship delicately blended; for what is true love but friendship of the most pure and honourable kind? And I rejoice, most unfeignedly rejoice, that our dear and amiable Flora is likely to make a choice every way so worthy of her election. The *Widow's Choice* will then, in spite of the envious sneers and malicious reports of an always ill-judging censorious world, be the choice also of superior taste and judgment, more intrinsically valued than all the petty opinions given by a multitude of pretenders and false judges, who, while they envy, vainly attempt to undermine that excellence which they can never reach,

and therefore would crush it, and doom its lovely blossoms to perish on a bare and withered soil, were they not protected by an ever-ruling Providence, preserved by friendship, and cherished by virtue."

Sir Hector, after this interesting conversation with the worthy Rector, approached Mrs. and Miss Evelyn, to bid them farewell, which he did in the most cordial and affectionate manner, giving them a pressing invitation to pass a few weeks with him and his sister Lydia, at Oldstock Hall.

"For remember, Evelyn," added Sir Hector, "that it is not Sir Oliver who is now the master there, nor is Miss Oldstock the reigning mistress, as formerly, but your old friend Hector, who will be master there as long as he lives; that is, till Harry gets a pretty wife, and then I will no longer be major domo of the family: and I have one in my eye for the dog already, I assure you; I have been on the look out for him ever since I came down to Stanmore, and I have selected a nice young woman, just after my own heart, to be the wife of my dear adopted boy, and to sit at the head of the table, when she is Mrs. Conway, at Oldstock Hall, and help me to some of my favourite dishes with her pretty little white hand. Now the query is, whether she will like Harry, when he has my permission to put the question to her, as I have little doubt of his having any objection to her."

Having said these words, the meaning of which was too obvious to be easily mistaken by the transported party it alluded to, Sir Hector approached Miss Evelyn to take his leave of her, saluting without ceremony

her fair transparent check, which no longer partook of the hue of the lily, on his jocosely exclaiming—

"Well, Miss Fanny, when I return from Oldstock, I shall willy nilly run away with you, whether your father and mother like it or not. I want to see how well you can sit at the head of a table, and I want to shew you Oldstock Hall; and as you are fond of music, Miss Evelyn, I will make Harry a vocal performer before you honour an old batchelor with your presence there. I will sing 'begone dull care,' and you shall sing, 'together let us range the fields,' and Hal shall chaunt forth his favourite carol, on purpose to amuse you. I often hear the sly rogue singing it, when he thinks there is no one listening to the pleasing strain. Zounds! what are the words? 'Fanny, will you marry me?'—the song Lady Emmeline sung, you know, Hal, last night. What, no reply? Well, he'll find the use of his tongue before he gets back to the Priory, I warrant me; he is a little tongue-tied of so now, Miss Evelyn, so you must not mind him; he'll behave better when you come down to Oldstock Hall, and sit at the head of my table, I promise you: so once more, good folks, God bless you."

Both Mrs. and Mr. Evelyn knew the humour of Sir Hector too well to check the torrent of his pleasantry; when once it was set a flowing, they might with equal hope have checked the current of the tide; and winking at the blushing Fanny to take no notice of it, bade him adieu with smiling faces and warm hearts: while Henry's adieu to Fanny was at once respectful, tender, and sincere; one look had conveyed whole volumes to

each throbbing heart, and one soft pressure of the hand was the test of affection.

On their return to the Priory, Lady Primrose was impatiently waiting breakfast for them; and turning to Henry, with an arch smile, she exclaimed—

"Well, how is my dear Mrs. Evelyn, and Mr. Evelyn? and pray, Henry, how did you leave *my* dear Fanny?"

"*Your* dear Fanny," cried Sir Hector; "well, that is a good one, is not it, Hal? We would have her Ladyship to know most decidedly that it is *your* dear Fanny, won't we, Hal?"

"Sir, Miss Evelyn must be dear to all who are honoured with the title of being her friends," answered Henry, in some confusion, which received no small addition, by Sir Hector very quickly replying—

"The title of a fiddlestick's end. You love the girl, and she loves you; so where is the use of denying it? But come Flora, my duckling, where's the tea and the muffins? This walk over to Evelyn's has made me as sharp set and as hungry as a wolf just imported from the American wilds. What say you, Hal? Why dost not devour the muffins?"

But Henry, at this precise moment, felt no inclination to indulge in the pleasures of appetite, which both Sir Hector and Flora observing, they laughed heartily at the expence of the young soldier, Sir Hector exclaiming—

"Nonsense, Flora, don't press him to eat, I beg of you; for you see he has breakfasted already: he has been feasting on the blue eyes and roseate lips of the pretty Fanny till he has no appetite for his breakfast.

Well, Hal, never mind a little absence or so, parting, with lovers, is the finest renewal of affection in the world; it is the test of constancy, and without constancy it is all a fudge; absence blows the flame more brightly, and they are only fools who fear or suppose that it can ever extinguish it."

Henry now made an effort to eat, whether he liked it or not, to avoid the unmerciful raillery of his patron. The morning meal being finished, preparations were now going forward. Juba, being very alert on such occasions, had got the baggage already placed in the chaise; and being the last morning of his visit to the Priory, was honoured with an invitation, by Mrs. Wilkins and the pretty Rachel, to breakfast in the housekeeper's room. Not that Juba, when he accepted of so condescending a mark of their favour, placed any value on their society, but it was a better breakfast than he got with the servants in the hall, and that, with Juba, who was a bit of an epicure, was a sufficient inducement; and having equipped himself in his livery, he made his *entrée* to the ladies just as they were about to commence their operations for tea-making; and drawing his chair close to the fire, he squatted himself down without further ceremony.

"Lauk, Mr. Juba, you'll burn your clothes," cried Mistress Rachel; "I protest you smell like a singed rat,—don't he, mother Wilkins?"

Mrs. Wilkins made an assent by nodding her head, and asked Juba how he liked his tea. But the "singed rat," which Mistress Rachel had so ironically compared him to, by no means sounded pleasantly in Juba's ear, and he surlily replied—

"No sweet; what for you put no sugar in him tea? make him sweet."

"Oh dear, I protest I beg pardon, Mr. Juba," cried Mrs. Wilkins, popping a handful of double refined lump sugar into the cup; "I had forgot what a sweet gentleman you are."

"Yes, he is partial to sweets," cried Rachel, tittering, "an't you, Mr Blackey?"

On which Juba immediately replied—

"Dat very reason me no likee you, Missee Rachel; you no sweet, me sure."

"You are a great black bear, that I am sure, or you would not go for to say such an unpolite thing to one of the fair sex," uttered Rachel, with a sneer, and a toss of the head disdainfully; "and I shan't be sorry when you make yourself scarce from the Priory, you saucy fellow you."

"Me no care what you tink," retorted Juba, devouring the hot buttered muffins with great avidity; "me no likee you, because you laughee at massa, say him ugly old man, no care how soon him go away from Priory. Me no likee dem no likee massa; massa good, good man; and when you old, you ugly too."

"There's a slap at you, Rachel," cried Mrs. Wilkins, highly entertained with this whimsical altercation; and very good-naturedly wishing to throw fresh fuel on the flame, which had been nearly out but for her kind assistance, she exclaimed—

"Indeed, Mr. Juba, it is very unpolite of you to quarrel with a lady just as you are going away, and you ought to kiss, and be friends."

As this speech was uttered in a kind of smothered

daugh; the pretty Abigail was provoked beyond endurance; and in no very gentle accents, she retorted—

"He kiss me? the filthy brute; I would as soop let the devil kiss me; so pray, mother Wilkins, mind your business, and trouble your head about your own affairs."

Here a smart rencontre commenced between the Abigail and the housekeeper, which was kept up with spirit on both sides, and at which Juba laughed heartily, till a summons from Sir Hector's bell put an end to the altercation between the two ladies, by the cause of quarrel being removed from their sight. Juba, snatching up a large buttered muffin that lay on a plate beside him, and cramming it into his capacious mouth, nodded his head by way of farewell to the offended beauty, muttering as he went out—

"Now me off, leave good company behind me."

To which the pouting Rachel only replied—

"And joy go with you, you filthy brute you."

While this scene had been performing in the housekeeper's room, another of a different description was going on in the parlour, with Flora and her uncle, who when the moment of departure arrived, felt how truly she loved her dear affectionate, though eccentric uncle; for tears started in her lovely eyes, wher he exclaimed—

"Now Flora, come and give me a kiss, for the chaise has been waiting this half hour, and the sooner I get into it the better for both of us, for I had always an aversion to the ceremony of taking leave of friends, if it was for ever so short an absence. Come, darling, don't let me see a cloud passing over the sun-beams of

that sweet countenance; you know I would as soon face the enemy as encounter a sigh or a tear from my Flora. Heaven bless you, dearest girl, till I am made happy by the sight of you again. Come, your grave looks have infected poor Hal."

And the remark was just. Henry, on approaching to take his leave of Flora, felt his hand tremble, and his eyes involuntarily fill with tears; for the uniform sweetness of disposition, and the friendship that the young and lovely widow had honoured him with during his abode under her hospitable roof, had rendered her the object of his veneration and sacred esteem, which sentiment was not a little increased by knowing that she was high in the confidence of the lovely Fanny, and that she beheld the growing attachment that subsisted between them with the most approving smiles.

"May every earthly blessing attend you, dear Lady Primrose," uttered Henry, in a tremulous accent, as he gazed on the fascinating smile, which, between two lovely roseate lips, had so kindly bade him farewell.

The lovely widow had by no means neglected to pay a proper respect to her aunt Lydia, to whom she inclosed a testimony of her affection by a gift of twenty pounds, in a kind letter, giving her an invitation to the Priory whenever she thought proper to favour her with her company. Flora had also troubled Henry with a trifling present to Mrs. Mildew, the housekeeper, well knowing that her uncle would not allow of this mark of her liberality, if he had known of it. But the lovely widow had learned the creed of returning good for evil, the first duty of all who profess to revere the holy precepts of our most sacred religion, and who call

themselves Christians, but which they cannot do while they neglect and even abolish the practice of some of its leading principles—humanity and justice, and charity towards the afflicted, the defenceless, and the unfortunate of their fellow-creatures; while they withhold these from the suffering sons of sorrow and calamity, let them not hope that they will be termed religious or moral characters, for like a wolf only in a sheep's clothing will they appear, and their hypocrisy be detected in its true colours, and consequently receive the just reproach and punishment that it has so truly merited.

But to return to the travellers and the fair widow. Behold her lovely form standing at the gates of her own magnificent mansion, the seat of peace and plenty, kissing her hand to her uncle and Ensign Conway, after they were seated in the chaise, which not immediately driving away, she tripped across the lawn, once more reminding her uncle of his promise to write to her as speedily as possible after his arrival at Oldstock Hall. To which Sir Hector, a little nervous at bidding farewell to the dearest object his heart acknowledged in this world's earthly space, instantly replied—

"I will, my darling, I will, as soon as possible; and now pray, my Flora, get about your business as quick as you can, that's a dear creature; for while you stay there, curse me if we shall see Oldstock Hall for a blue moon."

Flora took the hint, for she saw that her uncle was a little agitated, and once more waving her snowy hand, the travellers departed from the gates of Sun-

more Priory, and Flora returned to lay out her plans for the day. It was her first intention to take a ride over to the Rectory, and from thence to the Cottage, to bring away the amiable and lovely orphan from her cheerless, and now melancholy abode. In short, Flora had many plans in view; but her fluttering heart reminded her, by its beatings, that she had not lost sight of *one*, and that all other plans must be deferred till she had seen the Marquis of Rosalvie, who had informed her, even in the presence of her uncle, that he purposed to pay her an early visit the ensuing morning; and she remembered that her uncle smiled when the Marquis had proposed this early visit, and her heart fluttered, she could not tell why, at the expectation of receiving the Marquis alone. What could be the purport of this early visit, already known to her uncle? What could he have to say to her, more than what he had so repeatedly expressed to her before, that he was proud of being distinguished as her friend, and as her friend only. It is true, that before the departure of her uncle she had held some private conversation with him as to what conduct she ought with propriety to adopt towards the Marquis of Rosalvie, if he visited her at the Priory; and Sir Hector's answer was decidedly thus:—

"My love, you are no stranger to the rules which propriety prescribes to a really virtuous female, and I am well convinced that my Flora will never transgress or overlook them. For my own part, with respect to the Marquis of Rosalvie, I have no doubt but he is not only your friend, but will very shortly appear in the character of your lover, and that the present disclosure

of his passion is concealed for awhile, the more openly to avow his intentions towards you in the face of the whole world. This is my opinion, Flora; and I have no objection to your receiving the visits of the Marquis at Stanmore Priory, after the information he gave me last night of his being the confidential friend of your late husband, Lord Primrose. It is possible that he may have communications to offer you with respect to that clause in his will which forbids you to make a second choice without the consent of your guardian, Lord Arundel, whom he professes to know most intimately; and he described him to me as a man possessing many faults, with as many virtues. But you will see the Marquis, my Flora, and I do not doubt but he will be able to explain to you more satisfactorily than I can the character of Lord Arundel, with whom he has been intimate for a series of years.

Here ended the conversation of Sir Hector with his lovely niece on a subject so interesting. It was no wonder that Flora felt a little fluttered at the intended visit of the Marquis, when Lord Arundel, that so much dreaded man, was to be made the theme of their discourse; and the hour advancing that this visit was expected, Flora began to be a little fidgetty, intimating to Rachel that she wished to make some alterations in her attire, and desiring that she would get her things to dress with all imaginable dispatch, as she expected morning visitors, and after that was going over to the Rectory, where she would probably stay to dinner, a piece of intelligence highly gratifying to the ears of Rachel, who, on the strength of the [illegible] of Sir Hector Oldstock from the Priory, [illegible]

junction with her accommodating, civil, and obliging friend, Mrs. Wilkins, to invite a snug party of friends to eat a bit of supper, and play a hand of cards, well knowing that their lovely mistress would, ere they arrived, be long retired to the arms of Morpheus, and that, without her knowledge, they might keep it up as long as they pleased in the enchanted castle; for such was the title given to Staunmore Priory by the quondam lovers of the pretty Mrs. Rachel, as a compliment to the enchantress that presided over the nocturnal revels that reigned there. To the pleasing commands now issued by her lovely mistress, Rachel, in delighted accents, replied—

"I shan't be ten minutes in getting your things ready, my Lady, you may depend upon it. What dress would your Ladyship please to wear?"

To which Flora, with apparent carelessness, (but she was not careless in reality,) replied—

"Any thing that is not absolutely frightful or ridiculous."

Rachel stared; and observing the crimson blush that now dyed the transparent cheek of her fair mistress, archly answered—

"Look, my Lady, there is nothing frightful or ridiculous in your Ladyship's whole wardrobe; besides, if there were, you are so beautiful, that what is frightful in any body else, would, in you, look quite becoming. Beauties may wear any thing; and so may you, my Lady, for there is not the equal of your Ladyship in all the country round."

"Pray, Rachel, do as I bid you, without wasting your time in making such ridiculous observations."

uttered Flora, every now and then looking at her gold repeater, which hung by her side, with the most impatient and restless anxiety.

But scarce was the Abigail withdrawn to execute her mission, or Flora pronounced this sentence, when a travelling chariot, with green and scarlet liveries, drew up to the door; and the name of the Marquis of Rosalvie being announced, he was immediately conducted to the drawing-room, where Flora, in a flutter of spirits not to be described, and in her morning gown and mob cap, was perforce obliged to appear. On her entrance, she blushed deeply, on encountering the glance of the Marquis, which was respectfully rivetted towards her.

"I am an early, but I hope not intrusive visitor, Lady Primrose," uttered his Lordship, again re-seating himself in his chair; "but I apprized you that I intended myself the honour of a call, in the presence of your uncle, or I had not now have taken the liberty of appearing before you at so early a time in the day. I perceive that your Ladyship has not yet been to your toilet."

"No, indeed, I have scarcely had a moment's time to think of any thing this morning but my uncle," cried Flora, blushing yet more deeply than before: "it is not half an hour since he set off for Oldstock Hall; and I own I have been a little flustered in bidding him farewell; I therefore beg you will kindly excuse the dishabille in which I now appear before you, my Lord."

"By which, were I to speak truly, (and I always endeavour to utter truth,) your Ladyship sustains but

little disadvantage," cried the Marquis. "Few ladies would think it necessary to apologize for the negligence of their attire, looking so bewitchingly lovely as you do." And without appearing to notice the heightened blushes which now bepainted her lovely cheek, the Marquis added, in an apparently careless tone, "And so you have lost the society of your good uncle, and his young friend, Ensign Conway?"

"Yes, my Lord," replied Flora, "for a short time. My uncle is gone to the seat of his ancestors, to arrange some family affairs; after which, he talks of going to Florence."

"To Florence?" repeated the Marquis, with involuntary surprise; "and it is probable that your Ladyship may also accompany him to that province."

"Not that I really know of, my Lord," cried Flora; "my uncle but once suggested that wish of his; but it was none of mine, and I in consequence rejected it. I am not fond of travelling, and love home better than seeking pleasure abroad."

"Your taste, for a female, is correctly what it ought to be, Lady Primrose; yet it is necessary to travel, or remain profoundly ignorant of the customs, habits, and manners of other countries, or acquire our knowledge of them only by books, the authors of which sometimes lead us into the grossest deception that is possible, and frequently stray beyond the boundaries of all truth and nature. But were you to visit Florence, you would be highly gratified, for it is confessedly the most delightful country in the world; no country can afford a greater variety of surface, sublime mountains, fertile vallies, rural cottages, and clus-

tering vines; and the natives are a kind and gentle race of beings, remarkable for the simplicity of their manners, the purity of their morals, with a strong attachment to their native country. Were I to choose a residence in a foreign climate, I know of no spot I would choose in preference to Florence."

"Indeed, my Lord, you speak most highly of it," cried Flora; "yet methinks I should prefer England to any other country in the world."

"Very probably so," uttered his Lordship, "because you have never known any other."

His Lordship then respectfully inquired if she had seen or heard that morning from Stormont Lodge. Flora replied in the negative.

"I will give you a reason why I demand to know," cried the Marquis, smiling; "Lady Sophia Russel has stolen a march upon us; she was actually married this morning, by a special license, to the Honourable Captain Ponsonby, and has set off for his seat in Wales, Merrion Castle. The step was somewhat indiscreet, and certainly indelicate, the amiable Countess not being apprized of her intentions till within a few moments of the ceremony taking place. In extenuation of her conduct, she declared she had an aversion to a formal wedding, and therefore was determined to avoid it by the only means she had in her power."

"You actually have privately astonished me, my Lord, by such unexpected intelligence," cried Flora, "and I really feel for the amiable Countess, who must be deeply hurt and mortified by such a proceeding."

To which the Marquis coolly replied, "

"Now I am actually not surprised in the slightest degree whatever; for it is precisely the character of my flighty and whimsical cousin: and the only object who is at all pitiable in the affair is Ponsonby himself, in becoming the husband of so thoughtless and inconsiderate a creature. The Countess was indeed too kind and indulgent to her follies, which have of late been extremely disgusting to her friends, and disgraceful to herself; and her mother is fortunate in resigning her to the arms of such a man as Ponsonby, who, however passionately attached to her, will not suffer her to render him the laughing-stock for all his acquaintance."

"Still I deplore this rash step of Lady Sophia as being injurious to the feelings of a fond mother, and a most amiable and affectionate sister," uttered Flora; "for is not Lady Belmeine a most interesting young creature, my Lord?"

"It would be doing injustice to the sweet girl, were I not to acknowledge that she fully merits your Ladyship's favourable sentiment towards her," cried the Marquis, after a thoughtful pause, in which it was evident that his Lordship was embarrassed and confused; the cause of which he was particularly solicitous to conceal from the observation of the lovely widow. And Flora, wishing him to recover his confusion, now begged to know how the dowager Duchess of Pemberton was. To which kind inquiry his Lordship replied—

"Why truly, Lady Primrose, my aunt is somewhat nervous to-day; this whim of Lady Sophia's has put her out of temper with the thoughtless girl. She is

now with Lady Stormond, who immediately sent express for her; and on arriving at the Lodge, she found the whole family, as may very naturally be supposed, in the utmost disorder and confusion, occasioned by so unexpected an occurrence; the Countess perfectly confounded, and the sweet Emmeline dissolved in tears. My aunt of course will not leave Stormond Lodge till the family is more tranquil and reconciled to the conduct of the flighty Sophia."

A pause now ensued, in which the Marquis seemed to sustain some considerable conflict with his feelings. At length he made an observation on a portrait of a pointer, which was admirably executed by the artist, and had been the favourite of Lord Primrose.

"Yes, and had that circumstance been the only one that is attached to its memory, it would have been invaluable to me," uttered the lovely widow, with a gentle and involuntary sigh, which rendered her ten thousand times more beautiful in the eyes of the Marquis, who, now finding that the ice was broken, and that Flora had herself introduced the subject relative to the memory of her departed Lord, in a voice rendered somewhat tremulous by emotion, addressed her in the following words:—

CHAPTER XXVII.

"——— What would you have, you curs,
That like nor peace nor war? The one affrights you,
The other makes you proud. He that trusts you,
Where he should find you lions, finds you hares;
Where foxes, geese: you are no surer, no,
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,
Or hailstones in the sun.
——— Who deserves greatness
You treat with hate.
——— He that depends
Upon your favours, swims with fins of lead.
I'll trust none of you."

SHAKESPEARE.

"I BELIEVE, Lady Primrose, the period is now fast approaching, when the mystic veil which has so long destroyed my repose—when the canker-worm which has so cruelly preyed upon the vitals of my mental faculties, and absorbed every pleasing hope that love and friendship fondly cherished—will eternally be removed; and, armed with unshaken integrity, I shall have the honour of appearing before you in my real

character, and, without vanity, shall not blush to bear it. Till then, loveliest and most beloved of women, will you patiently wait for a further explanation of the mysterious conduct of a man, in whose beating heart your fair image reigns sole mistress! Nay, start not, Flora, nor blush in the presence of one who would perish rather than entertain an unchaste or dishonourable thought towards you. I told your uncle truly, when I avowed that I knew the character of the guardian to whom your late husband, Lord Primrose, consigned so dear a treasure and so sacred a trust, I said that he was a man possessing many faults, but, I trust and hope, with some virtues to balance with them."

"You are now speaking of Lord Arundel, my Lord?" inquired the now trembling and transported Flora.

To which the Marquis, with a peculiar emphasis and softness in his voice and manner, immediately replied—

"Yes, Lady Primrose, of Lord Arundel, whom your late husband appointed the guardian of his lovely wife at his demise; and who, though unseen for many a long day, has unceasingly fulfilled the duties of that sacred character, by watching over the happiness of the angelic Flora, and whose faithful and vigilant eye has never wandered from the sacred treasure that he guarded. Yes! the so much dreaded and hated Lord Arundel; the despised Lord Arundel,—despised by Flora—"

"Nay, my Lord, that reproach is unmerited, for

tered Flora; "for it is scarcely possible that I could despise a man whom I never saw. I never beheld Lord Arundel."

"Behold him now, then!" cried the Marquis of Rosalvie; "for Lord Arundel and Rosalvie are the same! They are blended in the same being who now stands before you,—the friend, the guardian, the—ah! will Flora suffer me to add one yet more endearing title? It trembles on my lip—it pants in my heart—it rests on hope—or it perishes by one charmed word—from Flora!"

Surprise, astonishment, wonder, and transport, too great for utterance, possessed by turns our young and lovely widow. The confession that had so suddenly followed so unexpected and pleasing a discovery, operated too powerfully upon her feelings; she essayed to murmur the name of Rosalvie, but could not. The Marquis, alarmed at her blanched cheeks and colourless lips, called upon her name in the most frantic agony; and it was not till a flood of tears had relieved her full heart, that she opened her lovely eyes, or became sensible whose arms had encircled her; and blushing deeply, she exclaimed—

"My Lord, I must apologize for the weakness I have betrayed; but indeed, indeed, it was involuntary. I am so surprised, and so confounded, and so—so—what shall I say, Rosalvie? Cannot you guess at a woman's heart, at the sudden discovery I have made, when I imagined that you was the only being in the world whom I thought was indifferent, to find that—that you—you"—

"Adore you, Flora," uttered the Marquis, seizing her snowy hand, and passionately pressing it to his lips, which did not now, from affected coyness, resist its fond pressure. "Yes, Flora, from the very moment I met your gaze, in the public haunts of gaiety and dissipation, I marked you with a wary, and perhaps needlessly jealous eye. I was not insensible to your loveliness; for who could behold that transcendant beauty, and that innate and unaffected modesty and pure simplicity of manners, with an eye of apathy? I acknowledged its preeminence, Flora, and I was not indifferent to charms that a monarch might have been proud to have called his own. My long attached and excellent friend, Lord Primrose, had not deceived me in representing you, in the fond colours of a doating husband, as the loveliest young creature in existence; of that my eyes informed me the first moment I beheld you: but, Flora, pardon the doubts I entertained that, with such superior loveliness of person, you might not equally possess that of the mind; for without mind, I consider the most beautiful female as frail. Forgive me, Flora, for having a moment cherished this thought, so injurious towards you, when I saw you for the first time in the gay drawing room, on the ball night, at the Countess of Stormond's, surrounded by a set of idle coxcombs, all pouring into your ear the insidious voice of flattery; and, with deep regret, I imagined that you had selected one of the least worthy of them as a partner in the dance. The personage I allude to is Sir Charles Ratcliffe, a conceited and contemptible ape, or rather a monkey,

so fond of himself, and his own fancied excellence, as to interpret every glance of a lovely woman, although of the most distant kind, into a direct and open partiality for him; and these are the sort of men (if indeed men they can be called) that do more harm to your sex, Flora, than the most professed libertine, and the most profligate and shameless debauchee in existence."

The Marquis for a moment paused, and the pause was filled up by Flora, who, with a smile of the most resistless fascination, exclaimed—

"Your remark on Sir Charles Ratcliff, my Lord, however just, will scarcely excuse your severity to me, because, if you had any eyes at all, (and you have eyes, my Lord, and I have often thought that they were very intelligent ones,) you must have perceived, if you had not been blind, as I said before, that no attentions of such a being as Sir Charles Ratcliff could possibly have attracted me; my eyes were invariably drawn to another quarter, to eyes that always were averted from me, with something so like aversion and contempt, that I have often sighed at the recollection of how little I had merited it."

"Beloved Flora," cried the Marquis, now gazing at her with the most impassioned fondness, "and did I indeed occasion that gentle breast to feel such commotion?"

To which Flora half playfully replied—

"Yes, indeed you did, and a great deal more than ever I mean to let you know. And there is my uncle; and you but know how unmercifully he rallied me

about you, and what I endured for having rejected the proposals of Lord Clairville, whom I did not like, and therefore would not marry, you would not accuse me of having listened to the protestations of monkeys or giddy fools, my Lord; for my first husband was no fool, and I should have been a fool indeed, in my second choice to have selected one inferior to him in point of intellect or feeling. I have frequently asked my uncle, in our moments of private conference,—supposing that (which I had no reason to believe) you, my Lord, had really any predilection in my favour,—what were his objections, should I be inclined to listen to your suit; and the only answer he always made me, was—was—You won't be angry, my Lord, if I tell you the plain truth."

"By no means, Flora," cried the Marquis, gazing on her fair and ingenuous countenance with the most rapturous delight; "I love to hear plain truth always spoken; but when it comes from the lips of an angel like you, it carries a double and resistless force. What then were the objections of Sir Hector Oldstock to my paying honourable addresses to his lovely niece?"

The manly and half indignant tone in which this was uttered very nearly intimidated Flora from proceeding in stating what were precisely her uncle's objections to her receiving him in the light of an accepted lover; but the Marquis, who had taken her hand, and pressed it to his lips with the most affectionate fervour, instantly banished fear. She saw before her the man she loved, and who loved her with the truest and the chastest affection; and what had

ble to fear, where innocence and conscious rectitude supported her? And not withdrawing her hand, she blushingly replied—

"My uncle, having heard that you were once married, and had been rendered unhappy by your former connexion, was apprehensive that in forming a second engagement, and with a widow too, you might have more unfortunately imbibed some prejudices towards the sex, which not even Flora, however highly honoured with your good opinion, might have had the influence of eradicating from your mind. This, and this exclusively, my Lord, was, I believe, the only objection that Sir Hector Oldstock had to the Marquis of Rosslyn forming any attachment for his niece."

"And what objections had Flora?" demanded the Marquis, with peculiar emphasis, and riveting his eyes on her lovely face.

"Who, I, my Lord?" cried Flora, with that brilliant vivacity which had formerly marked her character; "I—I had none; for I imagined that no man could love but one woman, if he loved at all, and I considered all other attachments immaterial, while the affections of the heart were held sacred and inviolate. Was I right, my Lord?"

"Incontestibly so, my dearest angel," replied the Marquis, rapturously; "no man can ever wander far from the object that he truly loves; or if by folly or temptation he for a moment strays from the hallowed shrine, he will return again to it with tenfold ecstacy and attention where his heart obeys the call, turning with disgust, and even abhorrence, from the

objects of all his former folly, and flies to the chaste bosom of virtuous love for peace, for bliss unattainable, which he could not find in the [illegible] of vice, intemperate passion, and giddy dissipation. [illegible] your uncle that Lord Arundel had [illegible] Lord Arundel now meanly disown [illegible] though I should for ever forfeit the ecstatic hope I now fondly cherish of becoming the second choice of Flora's love, I will be guilty of no deception [illegible] her.

"At the decease of my noble father, Flora, [illegible] had reached the age of manhood, I inherited a title and an estate, being an orphan, for my mother paid the forfeit of her life in giving birth to me. She was both young and beautiful, and the only daughter of the Marquis of Rosalvie, whose title I now bear, in consequence of his having bequeathed to me the whole of his wealthy possessions; and having no other relative, the title would have been extinct, had it not been the wish of my grandsire that I should represent it, which I accordingly consented to do, some years after I was in Italy. But in England this circumstance was not generally known, and I was distinguished, even in the circle of my most intimate friends, only by the name of Arundel, which was my paternal one, and by which I was always addressed by my friend Lord Primrose, with whom I had been intimate for a series of years prior to the death of my grandfather.

"My habits were never austere, Flora, but they were thoughtful and reflective, and studious, for one launched, as it were, at so early a period, on the great

stage of fashionable life. Neither was I addicted to the indulgence of intemperate follies: I had few associates of the male kind, and, certainly, none that I valued more or liked better than Lord Primrose, with whom, when absent, I generally corresponded, and consulted with on every occasion where I thought my own judgment defective. For some time, Flora, my condition might have been considered truly enviable; for I sailed down the stream of life with a heart as light as the dew which the zephyr shakes from balmy roses. I had all the blessings of life that wealth could bestow, and I never despised those who had less of fortune's favours: for the sons and daughters of genius I always had a smile—for those of misery a tear—and for the wants of a friend a purse as open as my heart; and I was happy, supremely happy, till, in a luckless hour, I consented to accompany a young Italian nobleman to Venice, not merely on a tour of pleasure, but to inspect a sale of pictures, which were esteemed a most valuable collection. I was anxious to behold them; ever being a lover of the fine arts, I was gratified by affording some encouragement to the ingenious professors. On the day advertized for the sale of the pictures, the Italian nobleman I speak of, and myself, arrived at Venice, went to the sale, and purchased a valuable collection of the most admired there.

"I have said, Flora, that I held but little intercourse with men whose habits and dispositions were uncongenial with my own; and I had still less with women of the lighter kind; and those with minds superior I

had not yet encountered, either in Italy, or in any other foreign climate I had seen; for which I was frequently exposed to the raillery of my friends, and to none more than the Italian, who one evening took me to the chateau of a distant relative of his while we were in Venice, who had one only child, and that a daughter, or rather, as she then appeared in my eyes, an angel, if all that was lovely or fascinating in the form of woman could make her one. But it was not only the beauty of Isadora that so passionately charmed my ravished senses; it was her innocence and simplicity that attracted me towards her. She was scarce sixteen years of age at this period of my madness and my folly; and after several interviews that I obtained with her, I declared my passion in the most honourable terms, to herself and her mother, which was immediately accepted; and shortly after this, in a moment of infatuation, I married her, and having purchased a beautiful estate in Italy, I took my young and lovely wife from her mother's house in Venice, and placed her at the head of a most magnificent mansion, my Italian friend, as I then supposed him in reality to be, visiting there occasionally, which, as being a relative of Lady Arundel, I could not form any reasonable objection to, although I approved not of such gay men being the associates of my wife.

"You may deem me too circumspect, Flora, or that I was unpardonably jealous, because I had married a beautiful woman; but I had other causes for circumspection than merely that circumstance, and at which I had frequently become alarmed, for the last-

dora whom I thought I had loved at Vienna, was no longer the Isadora of my fond affections, after I had made her Lady Arundel; and all at once she assumed and blazoned forth in a new character: she was ill-tempered, wild, extravagant, thoughtless, violent, giddy, and fond of cards! And it was then, with deep shame and remorse, that I repented of my inconsiderate, hasty, and imprudent marriage. But, alas! that reflection arrived too late; for availing herself one evening of my temporary absence, this perfidious, and I then found, most abandoned woman, eloped with her pretended and equally perfidious relative, and my supposed Italian friend, the Count Fancini. They fled to a lonely part of the Netherlands, whither I pursued them with the most frantic rage and jealousy, in addition to which, I thirsted for vengeance on the base paramour of the perfidious Isadora.

"But this vengeance was denied to me through the interposing hand of a superior power, which, had I listened to the warning voice, that whispered, 'Vengeance is not thine, but mine,' would have deterred me from following the base wretches who had destroyed my repose; for on my reaching the sequestered spot they had chosen for their retreat, they had quitted it to embark on board of a Danish vessel, and tempestuous weather coming on, that vessel struck upon a rock, and every soul that was on board of her perished in the bosom of the ocean. Thus was my vengeance satiated, and my revenge completed; and thus avert my injuries redressed. The sorceress, who had struck the dagger to my heart, could no longer

torment, and, I felt well assured, could never destroy the peace of another; she was gone, and had received the just punishment due to her crimes.

"Behold me now a voluntary exile from my native land, ashamed and fearing to see the only relative I had in existence, my truly excellent and venerable aunt, the dowager Duchess of Pemberton, my father's sister, to whom, in the bitter moment of my domestic calamity, I would have flown for peace and consolation, were it possible that I could derive it from any earthly being: but my peace was broken, and I felt that it would be long ere I should recover from the deep wound that I had received. I sought, in the deep shades of retiring solitude, to hide my grief; but solitude increased rather than diminished my mental agony, and I mixed once more with the world, with a prejudice, if not an aversion, for all womankind, however so lovely, that nothing had the power to change or banish from my mind.

"My domestic misfortune was known all over Italy, and I quitted it for newer climes. Although I had several times since that corresponded with my aunt and Lord Primrose on the subject of my incensing lady, alleging it as a sufficient cause for being so long absent from my native land, my friend hinted to me of his marriage with you, and alluded to the reflection that his fate might one day resemble mine. Pardon me, angelic creature, I did not then know the faultless being that my friend adored.

"But to proceed. On my return from Florence, I found letters from my several correspondents. They

had been waiting some time for my arrival. One of these was in the hand-writing of Lord Princeos; and even then unconscious that he had been ill, I thought that the characters were written with an unsteady hand; which the contents of the letter very soon proclaimed. In this letter, Flora, which affected me most deeply for the situation of my friend, he assured me that he had a presage that he should not live long, and implored me, by all the ties of friendship and confidence which had so long subsisted between us, to become the guardian of his young and lovely wife, intimating the clause he intended to make in his will, that you were to forfeit a third part of the property he should leave you at his demise, if you married without the consent of the guardian he should appoint to protect you from becoming the dupe of any idle coxcomb that might wish to obtain your hand.

"You may easily conceive, beloved Flora, what impression this letter had on the feelings of a man so strongly prejudiced against your lovely sex as I was, and with what difficulty I complied with his request. In short, I was so much averse to beholding you, that on my arrival in England, I determined to adopt my second name and title of Marquis of Rosalvie, instead of Arundel, in order to prevent your knowing what claim I had on your acquaintance: yet I own the motives I had for concealment were in part selfish."

"And intolerably provoking, my Lord, you will also acknowledge," cried Flora, with a bewitching smile; "but come, let us hear what self intended."

"Naively, my angel, that I might be the faithful

guardian of my precious treasure, without her having any fear of his exerting any control over her inclinations. I therefore left you at full liberty, and to make a second choice if you pleased, and when you pleased, without any restrictions from the authority of your guardian."

"And have I not made a second choice, my Lord," uttered Flora, deeply blushing, "a *Widow's Choice*, and without any authority from my guardian? Look in my face, and answer me that question. Was not the *Widow's Choice* made long ago?"

But the question was unanswerable; and whether the Marquis answered it or not before he quitted Flora, we cannot tell, unless we are witches or conjurors. We can only guess from what followed a few days afterwards; for Flora having received a flaming letter from the young baronet, Sir Charles Ratcliff, in which he made her an offer of his hand and heart, and avowed his adoration of the divine widow, she coolly replied, that she had long since disposed of her heart, and would very shortly dispose of her hand, to a gentleman who had for many months been the object of the *Widow's Choice*; which candid avowal so perfectly astonished, and confounded, and mortified the vanity of the fashionable baronet, that he immediately set out for his seat in the north of Wales, without leaving one single individual behind him who at all regretted his absence, or ever wished him to return again.

Meanwhile Flora, at some hint given her by her adoring Marquis, wrote to her uncle, intimating that

his presence would very shortly be necessary at Stanmore Priory, as her guardian, Lord Arundel, was arrived in England, and wished to consult with him on a very important point, which was matrimony.

The singularity of this letter occasioned the utmost surprise to Sir Hector, who, being seated at the breakfast table when it arrived, after having perused it several times, unable to develope its meaning, impatiently exclaimed, handing it over to his sister Lydia—

"Curse me if ever I had such a letter from Flora in my born days. What does she mean by matrimony? Can you make it out, Liddy?"

"La, brother, to be sure I can," cried Miss Oldstock, who was not a little anxious to inspect the contents of a letter which had produced such extraordinary surprise, "and without putting on my spectacles; it is as plain as the nose in your face what Flora means. Let me see,—'Dear uncle,'—that's plain enough, I am sure; then here is something about matrimony, and that's plainer still, isn't it, Mr. Conway? In short, brother, I suppose that Flora is going to be married again, and she wants you to come to the wedding; and I shouldn't in the least wonder if it is to this Marquis that you have been telling me about,—don't you think so, Mr. Conway?"

Henry was now compelled to speak, whether he liked it or not; and, with some hesitation, replied—

"Indeed, madam, I cannot presume to give my opinion on such a subject. Lady Primrose must honour any man on whom she bestows her hand, whether it be the Marquis of Rosalvie, or any other gen-

tleman; but, in my humble estimation, I think the Marquis most deserving of so lovely and amiable a female."

"Bravo, Hal!" cried Sir Hector, "you could not have made a better speech if you had been a methodist parson, nor one better suited to the purpose. But pour out the tea, Liddy; I shall snap it up with a bit of bread and butter, and be off directly."

"Off, brother? where?" cried Miss Oldstock.

"Why, to Stanmore Priory, to be sure," answered he; "don't you see there is something in the wind? And who knows but it may be blowing in a contrary direction to the happiness and peace of my poor Flora. There's her guardian, Lord Arundel, you hear, is arrived at last, and he wishes to see me; but gad zookers! if he says any thing against my Flora, I'll blow him to atoms in a brace of shakes."

"La, brother, you are so hasty," cried Miss Oldstock, "and fly in a passion before you know what it is all about. What can Lord Arundel have to say against Flora, I should be glad to know? unless he wants her to marry him, on purpose to get the whole of the property into his own hands."

"Marry him!" retorted Sir Hector, "Flora would as soon marry the very devil as Lord Arundel, I promise you. However, I will go and see how the land lies, and if Flora is as happy and as comfortable as I left her. Hal, go and order a chaise and four to be got in readiness immediately."

Henry obeyed the orders of his patron with more alacrity and dispatch than Sir Hector was com-

scious of, because he was aware that he would be his companion to the Priory; and in passing through the village of Stanmore, there stood an old-fashioned sort of a parsonage house, called the Rectory, surrounded by a clump of trees; and that there was a young lady under its humble roof, known by the name of Fanny Evelyn, at which his heart beat with the most thrilling rapture, too great for expression."

But Henry was not left long to indulge in reflections so pleasing; for Sir Hector, already equipped for travelling, had jumped into the chaise the very moment that it drove up to the gates, desiring Juba to bring his portmanteau, and to tell Mr. Conway that he was waiting for him. But Henry did not keep him waiting long; and stationed by his side, with Juba in his usual place, it drove off immediately for the magnificent mansion of the lovely widow; who, having consented to bestow her fair hand on the Marquis of Rosalvie as soon as her uncle was made acquainted with the explanation that had taken place between her, was suffering a little embarrassment when she actually saw him arrive. She had stationed the Marquis in an adjoining apartment, that he might hear all that she said to her uncle on the subject of her going to enter again into the state of matrimony. But the moment he entered the room, her courage failed her, and Sir Hector exclaimed—

"Well, here I am, Flora, set off the moment I received your comical queer little note, which curse me if either Liddy or I could make cleverly out, for all the lines were so straight; so off I came, with Hal at

my back; and now I'm come, do tell me what it is all about; where is this guardian of yours, who is so exceedingly anxious to see me, hey, Flora?"

"Only in the next room, uncle," cried Flora, colouring deeply.

"And what the devil is he doing there, when he should be here?" demanded Sir Hector, impatiently; "and zounds! Flora, how you tremble; what is the matter with you, child? How long, pray, has Lord Arundel arrived in England?"

"Some considerable time, without my knowing that he was my guardian," replied Flora, casting her eyes down in the most timid confusion.

"Well, it was devilishly polite of him, I needs must say, not to let you know of his arrival sooner. But why don't his Lordship make his appearance? Go and tell him that I am here, your old fond uncle, Hector Oldstock, of Oldstock Hall, in the county of Northampton, and that I want to ask him a few questions."

"Which I dare say he is very ready to answer, uncle," uttered Flora; and opening the folding doors of the adjoining apartment, in which she had stationed the Marquis, she bade him come forth and salute her uncle, calling him Lord Arundel; and in stalked the Marquis of Rosalvie, preserving the utmost gravity, and bowing low to the perfectly astonished and confounded Sir Hector, and no less agreeably surprised Henry.

"You, my Lord Marquis, the guardian of my Flora?" exclaimed Sir Hector.

To which Flora almost instantly replied—

"Yes, uncle, and he intends shortly to be my guardian for life, don't you, gardy?—if uncle has no objection to my marrying Lord Arundel."

"Lord Arundel?" cried Sir Hector, "why how the devil came the Marquis of Rosalvie to be Lord Arundel?"

To which the Marquis, assuming the dignity which belonged to his exalted rank, replied—

"By the death of my father, sir, I became possessed of a title which I was born to inherit by birthright, and by the will of my grandsire, that which belonged to him. With two titles I now appear to Sir Hector Oldstock, but only in one character, that raises me to an eminence above all other men—the guardian of Lady Primrose."

"And you will shortly appear in another equally desirable, I have no longer reason to doubt," uttered Sir Hector, heartily laughing at the little stratagem that had been played upon him by Flora; "and I congratulate you, my Lord, upon your success with the *Widow's Choice*, or *One, Two, Three!* The *three*, however, appears decidedly to be the lucky number, and has gained you the honours of the day."

And after this jocose speech of Sir Hector's, an explanatory conversation immediately took place, to the entire satisfaction of the happy party. To the Evelyns Flora had already communicated the very pleasing intelligence; nor was the amiable Countess of Stormond by any means a stranger to the *Widow's Choice*, or to the day that was fixed for her becoming

the Marchioness of Rosalvie; and none more rejoiced to hear of this approaching event than the amiable Lady Emmeline Russel, who amply supplied the loss of her sister by her exemplary conduct to her amiable mother.

Well then, now for the wedding day, which was ushered in by a bright beaming sun to the happy Flora and the transported Rosalvie. The Stormonds, the Evelyns, were all invited to meet at the Priory, to commemorate this happy day. Fanny was one of the bridemaids, and Lady Emmeline was the other. Miss Melville, who had been many weeks under the roof of her kind protectress, was also in the nuptial train, looking as lovely as truth and innocence could make her. The marriage ceremony was performed in a very impressive manner by Mr. Evelyn; and the lovely bride behaved as well as she could do in so critical a situation. The Marquis too, how did he conduct himself? Why, tolerably well, and looked extremely handsome. Who would not look handsome on their wedding day—*if they could?*

As soon as the ceremony was over, Flora was congratulated by all her numerous friends in the character of the Marchioness of Rosalvie. The bells chimed merrily in the village church, and a public dinner was given to all the poor but honest and industrious inhabitants of Stanmore. Presents were sent to the Llewelyns, (for the Welsh band was by no means forgotten by Flora,) each of the children were presented with new clothes, and their lovely mother was treated with every mark of respect and kindness that delicacy

could suggest. Flora had invited her aunt Lydia to be present at her wedding; but Miss Oldstock chose not to be there, because she could not yet reconcile herself to the Evelyn family, which she disliked more than ever since Sir Hector had informed her that the young soldier had surrendered his heart to the possession of Fanny Evelyn, and that he intended shortly to marry them, and give them a snug little fortune; and Sir Hector kept his word. Mr. Evelyn was applied to in behalf of Henry, and he gave him the girl of his heart without a dissenting voice, a year only after she had witnessed Flora's happiness complete, Sir Hector making a most liberal and handsome provision for his dear adopted son, and his amiable bride.

The venerable Duchess of Pemberton was prevailed on by Flora to reside wholly at Stanmore Priory, where this delightful and heavenly creature contributed to cheer and enliven the winter of age with the summer smiles of youth, by shewing her the most delicate attentions that her beneficent nature could suggest.

Lady Emmeline Russel was a constant visitor at the mansion of the lovely Marchioness; and Miss Melville continued to merit the kindness of her friend and protectress, by her uniform sweetness of disposition and propriety of conduct. At length she attracted the attention of the son of Sir Jasper Wilding, the fox-hunting baronet, who, at the death of his father, made proposals to Flora for obtaining the hand of her pretty orphan; and she became Lady

Wilding; somewhat different to the former lady who had once represented that title in the person of Betty Spinster.

Lady Emmeline Russel, in due course of time, gave her hand to an amiable young nobleman, and was a pattern for young wives; while her sister, Lady Sophia, by pursuing a contrary system of conduct, very soon made Ponsonby lament the day he had ever married her.

The happiness of Flora received no diminution; for even with the hand of hoary-headed Time there was no cloud that obscured the lustre of her transcendant virtues, or dimmed the joys of her peaceful days.

Two lovely and beautiful children were the fruits of her happy marriage with the Marquis of Rosalvie, a son and daughter, Flora the one, and Hector the other, in compliment to her revered and affectionate uncle, whose infirmities had increased with his advanced age, but whose whimsicality and eccentric disposition continued to the end of his latest days. He was always at the Priory with his still idolized Flora, and so fond of her little namesake, that he would take her on his knee, and patting her lovely cherub face, would exclaim, in a whisper to the Marchioness—

"I shall never live to see this girl the image of my Flora, but I do prophesy that she will have all your beauty, Flora; and Heaven grant that she may inherit all your virtues, in maid, wife, and mother, and that you may see reflected in your daughter

the blossom and the fruit of virtuous love, which are the greatest pride and glory of their existence, to her who made them the happy offsprings of a *Widow's Choice!*"

THE END.

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